

THE LORD PROTECTOR



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"THE HEAR" OF DENISE," ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

A MAN AND A MAID.

A LONG, shrill whistle rang through the woods. It was not loud, but penetrating, and went far into the forest, sliding past oak and beech, until it lost itself in still, dark deeps of green foliage and thick undergrowth.

For a moment the blackbird ceased his song ; the brown squirrel lay flat against the mottled chestnut bough, whereon he was frisking, and the fox, already afoot and ready to take the road, crouched low in his cover, with ears laid back, and but for the faint flick of his brush, seemed no more than a boulder.

There was a scramble and a scamper through the thickets as the timid deer, roused by the sound, dashed off in reckless haste, the stag bearing on his antlers long, fluttering strings of white-blos-

somed bindweed, which clung to him as he fled in blind terror, instinct leading him to some far-off refuge.

Then all was as before. The blackbird resumed his song, the squirrel leaped nimbly from branch to branch, and the fox with a snarl crept softly off through the low, dark tunnels of the underwood. It was but a whistle: there was no blast of horn or bay of hound, and, indeed, these never woke the sleeping echoes of the afternoon; but this born robber would take no risks, and so took another road to that which he had originally intended. He was bound to the outlying farm over the low hills to the west, where Boaz Hopkins was careless of his goods. With the morning Boaz would lament the loss of his fattest duckling—but there are things which touch us nearer than the forays of the red fox, and so to them.

A moment or so after the shrill cadence of the whistle had died away, a man emerged from the thickets and moved cautiously forwards, until at last he halted at the head of a glade, half overshadowed by an enormous elm. He looked on all sides of him as if expecting someone, or some an-

swer to his call, for it was he who had set the forest echoes ringing ; but he saw no one, and there was no response to his signal.

With a muttered exclamation of disappointment he turned abruptly aside, and, sitting down on the trunk of a fallen tree that lay near him, began idly digging into the green turf with his spurred heel. The age was one in which men were at each other's throats in England, and slew each other for the right divine of kings, or the diviner right of liberty, and our man was a King's man, as could be seen at a glance.

He was dressed in the rich Cavalier attire of the times, but his clothes bore evidence of rough usage, and the red plumes of the hat he had cast carelessly aside were thick with burrs, and frayed with the thorns of the woodland. The long, fair locks he wore framed a face that was eminently handsome—almost too good-looking, indeed, for a man ; but his grey eyes were keen as a hawk's, if like the hawk's they were hard and steely, whilst a short, upturned moustache concealed the bow of his mouth, hiding all trace of character it may have shown.

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To a certain extent, he had the soul of an artist, and, hunted outlaw as Kit Harden was, with a price on his head, and death but a few yards away, he let his eyes rest for a space on the landscape around him, and, in truth, it was fair to see. On the right and left of him Coombe Woods stretched deep and green. The rich sward at his feet was starred with wild flowers, and at the head of the glade a narrow pathway led up to a rising bank, all pink and yellow with campion and goldilocks. The pathway ran across a rustic bridge that spanned a woodland stream—a still, quiet stream that crept slowly along, and wound sluggishly into the forest deeps. On either side the wings of the forest opened out, showing a glimpse of green hills, the grey outlines of a stately country seat, the spire of a church, and the red roofs of a little hamlet, nestling in a hollow. In an hour or so the sun would set, and the shadows were already long, whilst a sleepy west wind brought across meadow and lea the sweet scent of the new-mown hay.

Perhaps some thought of the peace around him and the danger of his own position stirred a jarring note in the man, and he suddenly arose.

"Bah!" he said. "Ten years ago I might have turned a mawkish sonnet on this; but now it is dull—damnably so! I wonder what keeps my pretty maid? I shall signal again!" And once more the whistle went through the woods.

Almost on his signal, the slight, grey-cloaked figure of a woman appeared on the bridge, and with a little cry she hastened towards him. Harden went forward eagerly to meet her, and, as she came up, he took her outstretched hands and drew her gently towards him.

"At last!" he said, putting back her hood, and looking down upon the shy, proud face. "At last! I had all but given up hope of your coming! It is a whole week since I have seen you—know you what that means to me?"

There was a great tenderness and love in his voice, his hawk-like eyes had softened inexpressibly, and the girl yielded to the strong arm enfolding her waist, and thus they walked together, no word being exchanged between them until they reached the fallen tree-trunk. Here Harden bent down to kiss her, and saw that her eyes were full

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of tears, and that there was fear and trouble on her face.

"Doll!" he said, "is there anything wrong? Tell me, dearest!" She drew back gently from his encircling arm.

"Listen, Kit! I could not come before; I feared once I would not be able to come at all; but I wanted to be happy for just one moment before I spoke. I have ill news, Kit! News of the worst for you." His fine eyebrows arched upwards at her speech, as he smiled back.

"That is no new thing. Ever since Worcester field was lost, no day has passed but brought its tale of ill for me. I am used to bad news."

"But this is bad indeed!" She went on earnestly: "Your kinsman, Colonel Antony Maunsell, and his Roundheads are at Coombe Royal."

Harden started at the name, and a flinty look came into his eyes.

"Maunsell! Black Tony! He at Coombe Royal! When did he come?"

"He has been here a full week, with four score and more of the Ironsides."

"Curse them!" he muttered under his breath,

as Dorothy Capel went on rapidly: "But the worst is to come. They seek you, Kit! They have somehow heard that you are here, and the whole countryside is watched. I know this, and that they'll surely search the woods." Here for a moment her voice failed her, and her small gloved hand rested tremblingly on his sleeve as she gasped: "Ah, Kit, if they take you my heart will break!"

Kit Harden had grasped the full significance of her words as she spoke, and knew or rather felt that his hour was come. Since Worcester was won, and the King's side scattered for ever, there had been no greater thorn in Cromwell's side than this fiery spirit. Ever on the move, with a restless ability that might, but for other things, have made him the Claverhouse of England, Sir Christopher Harden, under the flag of Royalism, fought only for his own hand. He had lost his all. To him money was a necessity. Straitened means were worse than death to him, and he was now playing his last card to set himself on his feet once more. Dorothy Capel's lands and her ten thousand a year were all but his, and thus it was

gall and wormwood to know that he was trapped almost in the hour of his triumph.

But whatever emotions might have been in his mind he showed no trace of any thought, but of concern for the girl before him.

"Fear not, dear heart," he said reassuringly, his arm once more around her waist, "I would not that there was a tear in your eye, or a rose from your cheek, because there is ill news for poor Kit Harden. Besides"—and he laughed joyously—"none knows my hiding-place. Coombe Woods are dark and deep. Mind you how Effingham and Chetwynd lay here a whole week with Noll's bloodhounds baying all around them? Fear not, then!"

Dorothy Capel tried to smile through her tears; but it was in vain.

"But I do fear," she said. "They hid safe, 'tis true, but no soul about the countryside knew they were here; but, alas! I know this is not so with you. We have been watched and spied upon. Only yesterday as I left you I saw Elihu Burnside."

"The Parliament preacher! He here?" Harden's hand dropped to his side.

"Yes! He came here on the same day as the

soldiers, and Parson Hildreth's rectory is now his, and he was watching, spying upon us!" And she stamped her little foot with anger, and looked up at Harden's face, only to see that the man's mind was far away, and as he stood, leaning on the hilt of his sword, he murmured all low to himself, so that the words came not to the girl in their full sense and meaning: "Burnside! Burnside! If pretty Patience has held her tongue, all may yet go well."

All that Dorothy Capel heard were the words, "pretty Patience," and a jealous pang shot through her.

"Pretty Patience? What mean you, Kit?"

She had stepped back a pace from him at his words, and Harden brought himself together with something of an effort.

"I did but recall a memory. I—I—did this man and his daughter some service once—they called it saving their lives"; and then, with a careless note in his voice, he asked:

"Is she here?"

Dorothy Capel had stooped as he spoke, and was plucking at the wild flowers at her She

seemed, indeed, not to hear him, and it was only on his repeating the question that she arose slowly and answered coldly :

"How should I know?"

The flicker of a smile passed over Harden's face as he bent forward to answer her.

"Nay, sweet, be not angry! You know my heart is yours." But still she kept her face averted, her eyes upon the posy of forget-me-nots she had gathered, whilst she answered :

"Sometimes my heart misgives me; I——"

But Christopher Harden was a bold wooer, and well knew the ways of a maid. Forthwith he placed his arm around her, and drew her towards him, masterful and strong, as he spoke.

"There! Let this set your heart at rest, sweet-heart! I count these kisses as a miser counts his gold. You doubt me no longer, Doll?"

With this he gently detached the flowers from her yielding fingers, and placed them in the lapel of his coat, smiling as he did so, with love and tenderness in his eyes, upon the blushing face that rested on his shoulder.

So they stayed for a space, and then Dorothy

Capel came back to the moment, saying gravely: "No, Kit! I do not doubt you now—nay! Listen! Be serious for one moment. We must think of some other hiding-place for you. You cannot stay here longer."

"Best take to my earth once more," he answered; "there is nowhere else to go."

She wrung her hands as Harden went on: "Flight is impossible. The countryside is full of troops, and I have no horse, else I might win through."

"And the King's service and the Parliament have left me none!"

"Poor lass!"

"Ay, poor indeed!" she said bitterly, "for Maunsell is master in Coombe Royal now."

"Coombe Royal, too? Were not my lands of Hardenholt enough for him?"

"But there is more. The Lord Protector has placed me in Colonel Maunsell's custody, and—I am his prisoner."

"Prisoner! You!" There was deep indignation in Harden's voice, and, as if unconsciously, his right hand rested on the hilt of his sword.

Most women like to feel that the man they love is quick to resent any fancied wrong done to them. They love to feel the sense of safety in a strong arm, ready to strike at their lightest word, and so the colour came back to Dorothy Capel's cheek as she looked at the high bearing of her lover. "Yes," she ran on in quick anger, "I am forbidden by him to leave the house, else we had met before, but to-day I slipped away in my maid's hood and cloak. Think you they become me?" And she made him a rustic curtsey, laughing as she spoke.

And Harden gave the only reply possible, saying as he did:

"There is my answer, sweet."

"Only that! You might say something."

Kit Harden poured his heart out in low, deep tones, in a voice that vibrated with his emotion.

"Does that not tell you all? Can you want more? Your dear face has filled my waking dreams. The thought of your love is courage and strength to me—I who am hunted like a beast of the field. Ah, dear, I live but for your service and the King's."

She listened as only a woman can to the pas-

sionate words of the man, and then harked back womanlike to her jealous thoughts.

"And your pretty Patience?" she asked.

"The little Puritan!" Harden laughed out merrily; "look in your mirror, child! Is there need to fear?"

Something in the laugh jarred on her. She came close to him.

"Kit! You love me?"

He put his arm through hers, and lover-like they stood, he looking down upon the sweet eyes that drooped before his gaze.

"Love you? Ay! But for that love what would life be? 'Tis hard, dear one, to lie awake at nights, counting the rustle of each leaf an enemy, to see one's lands usurped, one's name besmirched with the foulest calumny; but if I keep my honour and your love——"

"Ah, Kit, Kit! Would that these times were over! But your safety, Kit! And we stand idly in foolish talk."

Harden was not the first man who was willing to risk his life for ten minutes with a sweet face and a pair of blue eyes so he only smiled back.

"Think not of me!" And then, he continued, in graver tones: "How can I leave you, mistress mine?"

"But I have naught to fear."

"Naught to fear! 'Tis little you know, Doll. And yet 'tis not I alone who should be able to see Black Tony's aim. Cannot you guess, child?"

"N—o!" she answered doubtfully, as Harden continued:

"'Tis you—you and Coombe Royal. He has waxed fat on the inheritance of his kindred. Under the ordinance he has seized upon Hardenholt, and now a richer prize lies within his grasp, and Tony Maunsell is not the man to hold back when a pretty woman and ten thousand a year lie in his hands. He is rich; he is powerful and high in Cromwell's favour, whilst I"—he turned aside as he went on bitterly—"I am a beggar and an outcast, and can stretch forth no hand to save my love."

"Kit!" she said, holding her hands out to him, "Kit!" But the despair of his mood went over him like a passing squall.

"A beggar and an outcast, I say. Why, the first man who meets me could kill me like a mad

dog!" And then he turned towards her as a sob burst from the girl.

"Not that! Not that! else you unman me. Oh, how I curse the follies of the past that have lost me all!"

She had steadied herself as he spoke. As he seemed to grow weak the frail woman became strong.

"Kit," she said, "take heart. Don't speak like that."

"Oh, I care not for lands or life, but to lose you——"

"I love you, Kit," she said bravely. "They will never part us."

"Never!"

"Never! Oh, never!"

Harden put his hand on her shoulder and would have spoken, but at that moment there came to them the mellow tolling of the church bells. It came to them with a sense of warning that they had lingered too long with danger so near. Dorothy Capel blamed herself in her heart for this, and drew back from Harden's hand.

"Kit, it grows late, and I dare not stay longer ;

and the woods are no longer safe for you. Oh, what shall we do?"

"There is nothing to do, dear heart!" he said grimly; "they will never, however, take Harden of Hardenholt living——"

But as he spoke a light came into her eyes.

"Stay, I have it! There is a place they have searched through and through, from floor to ceiling, and there they will search no more. Come to Coombe Royal at nightfall. You know the little postern; the woods run right up to it, and you can get there without a soul seeing you. The wicket will be open. Come through the garden into the blue room. I will be there. Until night keep to the Sanctuary."

"But once in Coombe Royal——"

"A woman's wit will save you, Kit. And now good-bye, dear heart!"

She let him kiss her once, and then, slipping from his grasp, ran lightly down the path. A moment later she had crossed the bridge and was lost to view. Harden stood looking after her, his hat in his hand, the long red plumes touching the green sward. Reckless as he was, for a little space

there came to him something that was almost a regret. Half unconsciously he repeated Drayton's lines :

" Since there's no help, come—let us kiss and part,
Nay, I have done——"

And then Kit Harden was Kit Harden again.

" *Peste!*" he exclaimed, cocking his plumed hat on his head. " I did not think this of you, Harden!" Whereat he laughed to himself, and, detaching Doll's flowers from his coat, held them lightly in his hand.

CHAPTER II.

A MAN WHO LOVES.

"THEY'RE all alike," he laughed, pointing with the flowers in the direction Dorothy Capel had taken. "Let a man but have turfed a little, flung a main or so, killed his man, and run through his estate, I'd wager a thousand to ten he wins his way better with a woman than any Master Graveairs—*par exemple*, my good cousin Antony! Ha! ha! I fancy I've spoilt any trifle of good opinion Doll may have had of him!" He paused for a moment and then ran on, "But Lady Dorothy Capel is a little—exacting, shall we say? Eh, Kit! She and Coombe Royal together might be endured; but without Coombe Royal——" He made a wry face and carelessly tossed the flowers aside. "Heigho! There are weary hours to be spent in that cursed Sanctuary, as they call it. Effingham and Chetwynd were at least able to play, whilst I—I am alone. I would I could set eyes on my sweet

Puritan again. Egad, she was even more diverting than that other girl. Tush! my memory goes. The little French girl that waited on the Queen——"

He stopped abruptly in his self-communion. His quick ear had caught a sound, and he pulled himself together like a stag, one hand resting on the hilt of his rapier. Thus for a moment, and then he stepped back behind the cover of the elm, and now his drawn sword was in his hand.

In that clear summer air sound travelled far, and Harden was not wrong. Someone was coming through the woods, and was close at hand, too. He leaned forward from his shelter, and took a searching, rapid glance down the little pathway, as it wound into the aisles of the forest, and then drew himself lightly back, with a look of astonishment and amusement on his face.

"Ye gods!" he exclaimed mockingly, as he glanced upwards. "Thou hast heard my prayer. 'Tis my little Puritan herself, and old Sawtext, too! I must get a word with her somehow! I'll take cover here! Chance may favour me, and I'll take the risk of the Cropheads finding me."

So saying, he slid back, soft as a panther, into

the covert with the noiseless skill he had learned in the New World, whither, when barely twenty, his hot blood had led him with Lee and Effingham. Crouched in the underwood, with a tangle of thorn around him, he waited, still as a stone. And he had not long to wait. In effect, Harden had but barely reached his cover when two persons came out of the forest into the open, moving slowly towards the bridge. A glance at their sombre attire showed that they were Puritans, and that one was a cleric; and of him it might be said at once that, unlike his sterner brethren, though he was no whit behind them in zeal, Elihu Burnside had a gentleness and simplicity of spirit that went far to soften his fanaticism, and, indeed, his actions had once or twice caused his sincerity to be doubted by the faithful.

In his daughter, who walked by the old man's side, the most exacting judge of beauty would, perhaps, have been satisfied. Tall and straight as a lance, the stiffness of her dress could not conceal the graceful outlines of her figure. The dark hair tried to escape in little curls from the prim bands in which it was held back, and there was a wilful

challenge in the night-black eyes of Patience Burnside that told its story, so that Harden, as he lay watching, old memories awake within him, muttered low to himself:

"She is a queen amongst women—a queen!"

They had stopped almost on the spot where Harden had bidden farewell to Dorothy Capel, and Burnside, pointing with his hand towards hamlet and church, spoke what was nearest his heart, using the quaint phraseology that his class affected.

"Verily, 'tis a stiff-necked generation, these men of Coombe! Daily have I called upon them to hear me expound the Word, but they answer not, neither do they come. Rather seek they the secret hiding-places where the false shepherd, the old Belial, whom the Council of State hath cast from his seat, deludes them with vain imaginings." Patience Burnside's long lashes drooped over her eyes so that none could see the expression in them, as she answered in a low, sweet voice:

"But surely the light will come to them?"

"Nay, daughter, my heart misgiveth me! 'Twill be to-day as yesterday, and as the day before—the Sabbath itself."

To the simple old man the fact that the countryside was royalist to the backbone, and let their faith go with their politics, was a matter of genuine and deep regret. It was his to point the way of salvation, as he thought, to these wayward sheep; but they strayed far from him, and would have none of a shepherd, in a snuff-coloured coat, thrust upon them by my Lords of the Parliament. All this his daughter knew, and in the hope of softening his disappointment she said:

"But there are those who will hear thee. Hath not Colonel Maunsell come to Coombe with the Cornet Rock and a host of his men of war? Surely they who are the chosen of the Lord Protector are godly men, and will attend to hearken unto thee."

And it may have been fancy, but there was a low chuckle in the thickets—so low, indeed, that neither father nor daughter heard the scoffer who lay concealed behind the thorn, with the bitter-sweet twining overhead.

Burnside made a gesture of disappointment as he answered, "They have come, 'tis true, but not to hear me. They have come to chase unto death our former benefactor, Sir Christopher Harden."

The red came and went from Patience Burnside's cheek. She dropped the glove she carried in her hand, and, hurriedly picking it up, gasped rather than spoke, "Sir Christopher, Sir Christopher Harden! Is he here?"

"Yea," came the answer, "and they hunt him like a partridge on the mountain side."

The dark eyes of the girl flamed with a hundred emotions. She bent forward, and there was bitter reproach in her voice. "And thou hast said nothing! And we might have warned him!"

Burnside answered not, but stood leaning on his staff, staring at the ground at his feet. His daughter's words had struck home, and there came to him the vivid memory of a day when the red blood flowed like water, when a fierce soldiery were let loose with the lust of slaughter on them. There was a sword at his throat, and worse than death in store for the fair woman who stood beside him, when it was all changed, as it were, on the instant, and life and honour given back to them by the man who was now a hunted outlaw. And so his daughter's voice, in its altered mood of pitiful entreaty, smote him sorely.

"Can we not help him, father? He must not be taken! Thou dost remember——"

"Yea." And the old man glanced at Patience beneath his shaggy brows. "Yea, I can see him now, brave, comely, and graceful as was Absalom, but a follower of Ahaz"; and with a fierce intonation in his voice, for his conscience was pricked within him, he added, "and what sayeth the law? 'If an eye offend thee, pluck it out.'"

"Thou wouldst judge him, father, even thou?"

He would not meet her face. "Nay, I judge not, nor do I forget. Hath it not also been written, 'skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life'? And Harden gave unto us life and honour."

And Patience Burnside thought that it were better they had died ere Kit Harden's comely face had crossed them; but the old man went on as if speaking to himself:

"'Tis a debt we can never repay."

The woman who loved rose in her again. "Would he were safe!" she exclaimed, and almost on her speech there rang out the blast of a trumpet.

"Ah!" she said. "What is that?"

Burnside shaded his eyes against the glowing sky and looked, and Patience followed his glance with eager eyes. Neither he nor she saw anything, but they knew, and Burnside said:

"They are hot in pursuit!" And as another and a louder blast sent its challenge out, he added, "If they search the Sanctuary, he is lost!"

"The Sanctuary! Lies Sir Christopher hidden there? Art sure?"

"Yea! Chance led me there the day we came, and I saw him with mine own eyes. He and the dead Malignant's daughter, Dorothy Capel. She saw me too, and fled through the green wood like a startled fawn."

Try as hard as she could, Patience Burnside was unable to quite conceal the effect of this announcement to her. She turned aside for a moment, and then, with whitening lips and an unsteady voice, hoping against hope, she asked:

"Not Lady Dorothy Capel? Not she?"

And even Burnside, old as he was and wrapped up in his religion, caught the pain in her tone, and a sudden fear went through him for this tall, proud girl, who was all in all to him.

"Daughter," he said gravely, his eyes fixed upon her face, "knowest thou not she is his promised wife?"

But the man does not exist who can sound the depth of a woman's heart. Patience Burnside read her father's thoughts as he spoke, and her face was like chiselled marble, as she answered simply:

"Nay! I knew it not." And then, with voice and gesture full of sympathy, "We know how he hath served us, and Dorothy Capel is young and fair, and my heart pleads for them. Oh, 'tis hard! 'Tis hard!"

And tone and manner were such that even a better judge of human character than Burnside might well have been deceived; and the old Puritan felt his suspicions abate, though a barbed arrow was deep in his daughter's heart.

She had borne this bravely; but worse was to come, for even as she stood, she saw, over her father's shoulder, the bushes part, and the face of the man she loved before her. It was only a momentary glimpse. There was a slight warning gesture from Harden, and he was gone.

What would have happened next, with the girl's

nerves at breaking strain, it is impossible to say, had there not been a violent and sudden interruption to the scene. Another and loud blast of the trumpet rang out, there was a hoarse shouting, and the Ironsides were at hand. For once Patience lost her head, and seizing her father's arm, she called out:

"Hasten! Hasten! We will save him!"

"Hasten! Whither? Lo! Ebenezer Rock, that Joshua of our host, rages through the woods like an angry lion, and who shall withstand him?"

Patience glanced fearfully at the thickets behind her, and wrung her hands in despair. And now there came a rush of trampling feet, a crackling of the bushes, and half a dozen hot and panting men, including an under officer, burst in upon the scene. One fell heavily as he came out into the open, and as he rolled over cursed loudly at the long jack-boots that had hindered his progress and brought him to the fall. Another, with a flushed face, and in a high excited tone, called out:

"Now whither hath the barbarous rebel fled?"

"Lo! He shall fall before us, even as Elah the son of Baasha fell before Zimri," was the answer

from yet another grim saint, as he waved his sword in the air.

But the under officer had seen Burnside and his daughter. A square built, bulldog-looking man this, with a slash across his face he had gotten at Newbury. "Halt!" he cried, and following the crisp command, he beckoned to the two with his sword, saying as he did so, "Here be a rook and a dove together, whom I doubt not I shall coax into cawing and cooing. Come hither, thou Boanerges, and thou, too, my pretty maid!"

A red flush burned on the preacher's pale cheek. The savage was loose upon these men he knew, despite their Scriptural language; and years of war had rendered them callous to death, whilst running through their austere creed was another faith they were themselves not aware of, and that was the worship of the great man who had led the New Model from victory to victory, till the crowning field of Worcester had made him King all but in name. And so there were times when the bulldog blood ran riot in them, and they cast aside all restraint, and thus they were on this occasion.

But Sergeant Tutbury's speech had stirred the

Old Adam in Burnside. It was almost an unheard of thing that he, a preacher of Saints, should be addressed in such manner, and by one of them, too. Followed by his daughter, he came forward and, with uplifted hand and threatening air, said:

"Thou man of Ai! Darest thou use such speech and such manner to me—a minister of the Word? Who, and what art thou?"

But Tutbury, his bead-like eyes glimmering far back in their sockets, answered mockingly:

"I am he who was known as Thomas Tutbury, but now called amongst men 'Hew-Agag-and-Deliver-Him-in-Pie' and my law is this good sword and the Lord F's commands."

But Burnside's words had had their effect, and there was one, too, amongst them whose fierce religion still burned hotly within him. With snarling lip he turned on his sergeant:

"And I, Lie-as-a-Bear-in-Wait-for-the-Heathen, who was known as Peter Mauley ere I shed the Old Man, tell thee, sergeant, that thou dost wrong to raise thy voice against this most worthy and excellent divine!"

The others listened, and their hearts began to

misgive them, and there was a sullen murmur, "'Tis a minister of the Faith, sergeant!"

Tutbury saw that he had gone too far, and he knew, too, that the consequences of crossing the brown cassock were mostly evil. So he tried to make amends in clumsy fashion, though the scowl still hung upon his brow.

"I ask thy pardon! My zeal for the Lord Protector is my excuse. I seek but to know if thou hast seen aught of Abijam, the son of Rehoboam?"

Burnside would have made some answer, but Patience replied demurely:

"Of Abijam the son of Rehoboam? There is none such whom we know."

"'Tis he, lady," put in one of the troopers, "the Malignant, whom men call Christopher Harden."

As he spoke, Peter Mauley began casting about and examining the thickets. He was scarce three yards from the spot where Harden lay concealed, and the girl's heart faltered; but she nerved herself, and, almost in the same breath, father and daughter answered:

"No man hath passed this way."

And, even as they spoke, Mauley's harsh voice cut in upon them:

"This grass has been down-trodden, sergeant! Let us search these thickets," and he struck at the underwood, bringing away long strings of bindweed and morel, and a branch of thorn.

Tutbury and the others stepped forward eagerly; but Patience interposed.

"'Twould be time lost. 'Tis where I stood scarce quarter of an hour ago. See, the bitter-sweet crawls over the thicket there, and 'twas that I looked at!"

Burnside made no sign or movement. The men stopped and hesitated, and Patience saw her chance.

"Hast searched the ruins near the dyke? Or the moorland beyond? They hold many a better hiding-place than thorn and bramble."

There was truth in the words. The girl's explanation was so simple and reasonable that it carried conviction with it, and Mauley, with one sharp glance at the speaker, suddenly turned back from his ferreting amongst the bushes, exclaiming, "Aye!

Aye! She is right!" and Tutbury, after a moment's thought, said:

"Thou sayest well, mistress. And there is a thousand pounds on his head, of which thou wilt get thy share for thy help. Mauley! We waste time, men, and the evening grows apace. Away, then, lest the Moabite escape."

And they turned and clattered over the bridge, Mauley, in sheer wantonness, blunting the keen edge of his sword on the red robin, as he brought down clusters of flowers with each slash as he went—the last of all; but as he gained the bridge, he turned back and looked at the twain standing there, with a strange smile on his face, and then he hastened after his fellows. On they went, hot and eager, and heard not Patience's mocking farewell: "Blockheads! Long may ye search."

But even as she spoke a wild idea came to her to have speech with Harden at any cost. He was there close at hand, and she felt that she must see him once more—hear once again the sound of his voice, even if it were for the last time.

She turned to her father, who throughout this scene had stood, leaning on his staff, glowering at

the turf at his feet. If she could be free of him, if only for a little, she would get speech with Harden, and learn the yea or nay of the story she had heard about Dorothy Capel. That Harden was still in his hiding-place she felt, and so, with a quick impulsiveness, she turned to Burnside.

"Go, father," she said; "haste to the Sanctuary, and warn Sir Christopher that these men have been put on the wrong track; he may escape yet."

He looked up heavily at her. His zeal for the cause and his gratitude to the man whom the leaders of that cause had doomed to death were struggling within him. He had remained silent whilst Patience had put off Tutbury and his men. Though he was not sure of it, and did not quite understand, he felt in some indefinite way that this was being done, and he had allowed her to carry out her purpose; but to actively assist in Harden's escape was a step that made the zealot hesitate.

"This is against my duty," he said, and as memory of the scene in the past came back to him, he wavered. "Yet what do we not owe him?"

But Patience hardly heard his answer. "Oh, tarry not!" she exclaimed. "Each moment is as

gold. Thou knowest each path within these woods, and there is none who will suspect thee or thy mission. Hasten, then; I will await thee here."

"My duty?"

"Oh, duty in an hour like this!" And she turned on him almost fiercely. "But a moment ago thou saidst we could never repay our debt. Father! wouldst hand him to the death?"

Her hand was resting on his shoulder, her eyes blazing into his face, entreaty and command in them, and he faltered. For a moment he resisted and strove within himself, but there was a strange compelling power in the dark glance that was fixed upon him, and—he yielded.

"Ay!" he said, "thou art right. He shall be saved. Rest here till I return."

And without more speech he turned and passed down the little path, walking at a pace that would have been thought impossible for one of his years.

Patience was alone at last. But now that she had gained her point she made no further effort. She did not dare look behind her at the thickets where Harden lay hidden. She began to tremble, and her limbs failed her so that she sank down on

the fallen trunk and sat there shivering, her face buried within her hands.

Who shall tell what thoughts were running through the girl's heart, what memories were awake within her? She had been wronged—as bitterly wronged as any woman had ever been, but woman-like she loved Harden still; yet it was with a love fierce and passionate, that could kill rather than lose. It must be all or nothing with her. And so she sat, her burning face within her hands, whilst the bushes behind her parted noiselessly, and Kit Harden stepped forth.

CHAPTER III.

THE LUCK OF HARDEN.

AT the touch of his hand on her shoulder, she sprang up and faced him, shaking in every limb.

"Sir Christopher! What madness brings you here?"

He laughed in his gay, reckless way.

"Madness indeed! 'Fore God! that scoundrelly Roundhead's blade passed within an inch of me; but—" he took her hands, and looked straight into her eyes, as he added, "Sir Christopher! Why so cold a greeting? Why not Kit, as in the old days, sweet?"

She had been wronged by this man, she had been slighted by him, and now he was back again at her feet, wooing her as in old days. She could forgive him the wrong; but the slight—never! All her proud and jealous heart rose within her; the fair face of Dorothy Capel seemed to hover near her. No! She could not forgive. A mist came

before her eyes. She tried to steady herself, and with a quick, rapid effort, she freed herself from his grasp. "Cruel!" she gasped. "Those days are past. Would they had never been!"

He was watching her as a cat would a mouse. There was not a pang of remorse, not one thought of pity in that heart of steel; but no true lover could ever have put more tenderness in his voice, or made his eyes shine brighter with love-light than Harden.

"You would forget me?" he asked.

She made no answer. All power of speech had left her, and she stood, her face half averted from him, tall and white as a lily.

"I see!" he went on bitterly. "A very woman after all! Well, finish it! Call to your Round-! I will not seek escape. Life is of no value to me without your love—but you have never loved me."

Every word went home, but the last words stirred her to the deeps. Wave after wave of memory swept over her soul, lightning-like in their speed. He had been the hero of her girl's heart; and she had laid on the altar of that hero-worship all the treasures of her love. Up to a moment ago

she believed in him still, when her father's chance speech swept away, as with a wind, the card-castle she had built. But for one thing she could yet forgive him all—but not that! She turned upon him quick and passionate, and yet there was most pitiful suffering in her voice.

"Never loved you? Oh, Harden! Dare you say that? And you—what have you done?"

The beautiful, sorrow-stricken eyes were full upon him, burning with love and mute reproach. For a moment even Harden's front of brass was pierced, and he stood abashed, playing with the hilt of his sword. For once the hawk's eye fell, and his forehead flushed with shame. A new feeling, something that he did not realise, awoke within him.

"I—I—" he stammered, but she broke in upon his speech, pouring out her heart.

"You have taken from me all that a woman holds dear. You have made my life a living lie—a living lie, I say! Oh, the shame of it! The sin of it! I think and think until my brain is on fire, and I could kill myself—but I dare not! I dare not!"

"Listen!" he began, as he approached a pace nearer to her; but as if with a last effort she broke out:

"No, no; I will not hear you. Go, I say. There is danger here. Go, for your own sake, if not for mine."

"I cannot go now. I cannot go leaving you to think me the vilest of men. There is no word of truth in the story you have heard. Lady Capel is for the King, as I am; and she has but aided and sheltered me, as she and hers have aided and sheltered others."

"If I could believe!"

"Ah, jealous heart! Listen! There is but one chance for me, and that is in Lady Dorothy Capel's help. I am ringed in, and but for her my life is not worth the throw of a copper. My hiding-place here is being searched; but I will seek Coombe Royal to-night. I shall be safe there, and with the morrow leave England for ever."

"For ever?"

"Ay, for ever. But, sweet! there is that in your eyes beyond the anger in them that bids me hope yet. And I—I have hungered to see you, to feel

the touch of your hand, to hear the sound of your voice. I have risked almost all for a word with you this evening, and the luck of Harden follows me, and I will escape yet. Come with me; there's many a brave gentleman carving a fortune for himself in Poland and in Muscovy. We will go there out of this land of sorrows. Come—my wife!"

He had played his last card with all his skill, and as their eyes met he saw that in her look which told him he had won.

"My dear! My dear," he said, and drew her towards him. She said nothing, but clung close to him. All doubt had vanished with his words, and she trusted once again as woman has done before, and ever will.

But grim reality was at hand. As they stood they heard the distant beat of galloping hoofs rapidly approaching nearer and nearer, until there came to them the dull, heavy thud that a horse makes when going over turf. As the ominous sound approached, Patience sprang back.

"You hear that? Fly! Fly!"

Harden turned to go; but even as he did so Burnside appeared at the head of the glade, hot

and breathless. It was well for the old man that he had not arrived a moment sooner, and well for Harden too. "'Tis useless; 'tis in vain," he began, and then his eyes fell upon Harden. What he would have said, however, was checked by Patience. With passionate eagerness she turned to Harden.

"Go! We will detain them. I swear we will."

Harden gave one quick glance around, and slipped into the forest. No lumbering, heavy jackboot tread was his; but, light and agile as a leopard, he was gone in a flash.

He had not gone a moment too soon. Scarce had the wood closed over him than a party of about a dozen horsemen came round a sharp turn of the glade, and made straight towards Burnside and his daughter.

They had but time to exchange a few words and a glance together, when the leading horseman rode rapidly up and reined in, the others halting as he did.

It was Colonel Maunsell himself, the grim leader of horse, whose name was a terror to the Royalists. Tall—very tall—the sombre attire he affected, and

the great black charger he rode, together with his dark hair and sun-tanned features, more than accounted for the sobriquet he had gained. There was not one, however, who marked the firm, steady glance of his eye, or the high resolve that sat upon his face, who could not but think that here was a man who was incapable of a mean action, whatever his faults might be—and the times were such that men did not sin in a peddling way.

He had reined in a few feet away from Patience and Burnside, both of whom were known to him by sight, and, saluting gravely, was about to make an inquiry, when Patience put in:

"Sir, my father goes to preach the Word. Will not you come to hear him?"

"Ay!" said Burnside. "Come, the Truth swells within me."

Those swiftly spoken words—that glance exchanged between father and daughter as Maunsell rode up were bearing fruit. They were resolved to stay him at all costs, and Burnside for a moment forgot the zealot in the man, and, taking the cue his daughter gave him, played his part bravely.

A frown came on Maunsell's brow.

"Nay," he said shortly, "we have other work. This is no time."

"And such work—thine own kinsman!"

It was Patience who spoke, in tones so low that Maunsell alone heard. Their dark eyes flashed at each other for a moment, bitter scorn in the look of the girl, anger and astonishment in that of the man. The frown deepened on his face, and he was about to say something, when there was a crashing in the thickets, and Peter Mauley, who had been making a cast back, came out, flourishing a lace-edged kerchief on the point of his sword. The fanatic appeared almost beside himself with excitement, and, as he came up, shouted:

"Lo! I, Lie-as-a-Bear-in-Wait-for-the-Heath-en, say that the rebel follower of Jehoram lies under our hands. Seest thou this toy? Pheugh! 'Tis rank with the perfumes of the Moabites. I found it here amongst the brambles." Maunsell had sprung from his horse as the man came up, and called to him, but Patience, with a smile on her face exclaimed:

"'Tis mine!"

"Thine, lady?" said Mauley, hesitating, as he

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stood with uplifted sword, and then Maunsell's grave, quiet tones struck in :

"Lower thy sword, Mauley!" And as the trooper did so, he took the kerchief from the point, and held it for a moment in his hands. As his glance rested on it, his face became graver and sterner, and he looked up again at Patience, who stood with parted lips and hand half outstretched. His piercing glance almost read into her soul ; but there was something, too, stirring within his heart. That low whisper, "Thine own kinsman!" which had caught his ears alone, seemed to repeat itself, and to waken with it the ghosts of long dead memories. There was a time when these two had been closer than brothers, until one day the mask fell from Harden, and the other knew him to be what he was. The stern face grew darker and darker, the frown on his forehead deepened. All around was a dead silence, which was only broken by Patience faltering once more :

"It is mine!"

There was one swift glance of the dark eyes, and then, without a word, Black Antony Maunsell lifted his hat, and handed the kerchief to her ; but

as he did so, and caught the flash of joy in her look, he muttered under his beard, "Can Harden spare nothing?"

He had guessed enough to make him understand the little play before him. It mattered little who held the scented rag he had given Patience. He knew now that Harden was near, and that although the girl screened him—he did not for one moment associate Burnside with this—his hand would soon close on his man. There could be no escape from him now, and a sudden anger rose within him—anger at himself at the thought of his momentary weakness, when Patience Burnside's whispered taunt had gone home. Kinsman or not, Kit Harden was a dead man if Black Tony crossed his path.

And now chance, or fate, call it what you will, gave father and daughter another opportunity to detain the pursuers. Mauley, who had watched the return of the kerchief with exceeding dissatisfaction, turned to Burnside and asked with a suspicious leer:

"And thou hast in truth seen nothing of him for whom we search?"

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Burnside's pale face flushed ; but Patience came to the rescue.

"Thou hast already been answered, man ! Delay us no more ! My father goes to preach the Word."

And Maunsell, who was still sore within him, as he turned to mount, said roughly :

"Preach it to the trees there, Master Burnside. This eve there is no soul to hear thee."

Patience had thought that all that could be done had been done to give Harden time, and now an unseen power had, as it were, dropped from Heaven to her aid, and played the rest of her hand for her. Maunsell's rough speech stung Burnside to the quick. All the fierce zeal in the old man's heart flamed up, and he was in a moment as red hot a fanatic as ever took his part in those stirring days. He forgot all about Harden.

He thought only of the Word that had been scorned, and, advancing with flashing eyes and uplifted hand, he gave back scorn for scorn.

"Ay !" he said. "Thou sayest well ! A Voice hath before now been heard in the wilderness, and this eve these drear woodlands shall hear it again. And thou, Antony Maunsell, who hath grown great

in the land, go thou thy ways! Yet, min^d ye! what the Lord hath given, that can He take from thee, proud man! But there are those here who will stay, for it is not I who will speak, but the Voice within me, and it calls unto them, the faithful of our Hosts."

With a low cry of joy Patience turned to her father, only to grasp in a moment that this was no play acting, but a reality strong and passionate, and that what had happened was to bring them more powerful help than she had ever dreamed of. Maunsell heard him through, his foot resting in his stirrup. What answer he might have made no one can tell; but the words of the preacher had gone home to the saints, and there were deep murmurs of "The Voice! The Voice!"

"A truce to this foolery!" exclaimed Maunsell, and, springing into the saddle, he gave a quick order to his men to move off; but for once the bands of discipline were loosed, and no man stirred from his place. There was a clanking of scabbards, a jingle of bits, and a slight swaying movement in the troop; but no man obeyed his leader.

"By God!" he began furiously, "there are traitors here."

"And thou a traitor to thy God!"

Burnside's voice, high and shrill, broke in upon his speech. Like some prophet of Scripture, the old man stood before him, his white hair streaming in the wind, his burning eyes, with all the fire of ecstasy in them, shining from out his pallid face. And now there was a sustained and uneasy movement in the troop, and Mauley's harsh voice rang out:

"I thirst! And my spirit is dry within me!"

The effect was electrical. In one moment every man had sprung from his saddle and crowded round Burnside; there was a waving of swords, and a deep, hoarse cry:

"The Word! The Word we heard at Nazeby and at Worcester!"

The splendour of the sunset covered them as with a mantle of gold. It burned blood red upon the hoary tree trunks. For a single glittering moment the uplifted blades flashed as the flaming swords of the seraphim, then down they sank in one bright ray as they were lowered, and with bowed

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heads the grim troopers of a hundred fields stood to listen. The fever of the thing caught Maunsell also, and, as Burnside began in low, solemn tones, he, too, dismounted, and, hat in hand, stood reverently, a little apart from the rest, leaning on the hilt of his sword.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LITTLE GOD'S ARROW.

IT was close upon noon on the very day on which the events already narrated occurred, that Colonel Antony Maunsell was pacing the terrace of Coombe Royal, lost in thought. Barely a week had passed since he had come there as master, armed with the authority of the Lord Protector, and the Ordinance of the Lords and Commons, for sequestrating the estates of notorious Malignants. As Worcester's broad lands had gone to Cromwell himself after Waller's plot had failed, as Hardenholt was already his, so also was Coombe Royal in the hollow of his hand, and Maunsell was in truth great in the land. He stopped for a moment and gazed before him. All seemed at peace, and yet, behind the high holly hedge that skirted the lawn, where the peacocks were basking and preening themselves on the thick soft turf, he caught the sunlight shining

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on the musket-barrel of a sentry, and now and again the fitful wind brought him a hoarse command, and the clinking of bits and the clatter of hoofs, as the troop, which he was to leave that afternoon to patrol the countryside, formed up at the hall door, awaiting their leader. Straight in front of him the skirts of Coombe Forest rested on the low hills to the west, and there the marches of Hardenholt began, and both were his—a princely domain. And yet there was a spider in the Colonel's rose. He pulled at his black moustache, and was about to resume his walk when a heavy footfall arrested his attention, and, turning sharply round, he saw his cornet approaching.

In his youth Cornet Ebenezer Rock had been a shepherd of the dales; but the sound of the trumpet had reached even there, and he had followed it, as others had done, and gone forth to strange lands. He was now a veteran soldier, who had seen war in the Low Countries, and trailed a pike behind Bernard of Weimar in the terrors of the Thirty Years' War. He was tall, almost as tall as his colonel, and lean as a rail, but strong as whip-cord. When the war-storm burst over his own country he

had come back to England, and then, as he was wont to say, the tears fell from his eyes, and he stood face to face with the Lord. It is needless to say which side he took. It was such as he who formed the backbone of the New Model. Good soldier though he was, in many things simple as a child, and despite his frowning appearance, which was enhanced by the black patch he wore to cover an eye lost at Dunbar, he had an honest heart. It was whispered that, though in other respects the bravest of the brave, there was one thing he feared, and that was a woman. Certain it is that the Cornet had no commune with the sex beyond looking sourly at them, and giving them the road with marked emphasis when occasion arose, and the rustle of a skirt was sufficient to make him beat a retreat when perhaps the best sword in England would have failed. Such was the man who now saluted his Colonel, and made his report for the day.

When it was over, Maunsell asked, "And still no news of Harden?"

"None, except that he lieth concealed; but that will not be for long."

And then there was a moment's silence. Maunsell tugged at his moustache, and the Cornet looked straight to his front, a stony stare in his one eye. There was evidently something that neither wished to broach first; but the Cornet was immovable as marble, and the Colonel spoke.

"And have all my orders been carried out to the letter, Cornet?"

"Yes, Colonel. All roads are watched. Sergeant Tutbury searches the woods. My troop is ready, and but awaits orders. I myself keep ward over the house and park."

The Cornet spoke rapidly, like a child repeating a lesson by rote, but he had avoided the real point. It was, however, pressed upon him.

"And my instructions in regard to Lady Capel?"

"That she was not to quit the house until further orders?"

"Yes, yes!"

"This has been conveyed to her."

"By you, Cornet?"

Rock hesitated, and then replied, "No, Colonel. But by a sure hand."

"Rock!" thundered the Colonel, "didst send the message by a trooper? If so——"

"No, no!" Rock put in hastily; "but by a sure hand. I am but a blunt soldier, and so I thought——"

"You would get someone else to bell the cat," said the Colonel forcibly, and Rock's one eye flashed fire. He held himself still, however, whilst his commander continued:

"Well, after all, perhaps, there is no ill done, and I myself will take care my message is understood. Go, now! I will take out the patrol myself shortly."

Rock saluted, and was about to turn on his heel when Maunsell checked him.

"Stay, there is news of import. His Highness will himself be here shortly. His health hath been bad of late, and the air of Coombe is good; in short, he may be here at any moment. See that all is ready for his reception."

"The Lord General!" and Rock's eyes lit with joy. "Yea, it will be as manna to the chosen to see him once again. All will be ready, Colonel, fear not."

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And, saluting once more, the Cornet marched off, leaving his colonel still standing, glowering in front of him, until he suddenly burst out, with a gesture in the direction Rock had taken:

"And I accused him of getting someone to bell the cat. I asked him to do what I feared—yes, feared is the word, Antony Maunsell. At eight and thirty, you fear to face a girl of twenty, and tremble at her very look. What fever hath seized thee?"

He stopped for a moment, and then burst out, "'Tis a dog's business this and I will have no more of it."

With this he walked across the terrace with rapid steps, and, entering the house, sought his apartments. To do so he had to walk along a corridor, lined on each side with suits of armour and frayed and tattered banners, and, as his measured tread awoke the echoes there, it seemed as if his presence had brought back the spirits of the dead knights of Capel to fill once more their mail, and that from every vizor there flashed at him eyes that burned with wrath and hatred.

He halted for a moment at his own door and looked back. The silence was intense. In all that

vast building it was as if the chill of death had fallen. As he looked down the dim corridor the figure of a woman flitted across it at the extreme end. It was just a momentary glimpse of a graceful, swift-moving figure that he caught, but Maunsell felt his blood flame through him, and he made a half step forwards, and then checked himself.

"Tush," he said, "a servant maid!" and without more ado he entered his room. There was a table near the window, the papers on it were arranged in a neat and orderly manner. Maunsell glanced at it and then at the French horologe on the wall.

"I can spare an hour yet," he said, and then seated himself at his desk.

Unlocking a leather despatch case, he took therefrom a document and glanced over it. It contained his instructions, written in a strong, firm hand; brief, clear, and incisive orders, and as the Colonel's eye ran down the page he seemed to feel the very presence of the Lord General of England.

"Ay," he muttered, "they must be obeyed—to the letter."

He put down the paper and took up another

carefully fastened up, and as he opened it he frowned.

"Willis' passport, the safe-conduct out of England for Monsieur Falaise. Why not Monsieur Mouchard or Monsieur Espion? Bah, the very sight of the traitor's name sickens me. I see it bears an open date, and Willis is to receive it from my own hands. Well, let him come. This will keep for him." And Antony Maunsell knew not then that Willis the traitor and spy, the man who sold the secrets of his master the King, had at last lost the rubber he was playing, and was lying dead in London town, with a broken rapier in his false heart. So he kept the safe-conduct, which found its use hereafter.

The Colonel put back the papers in their case, and then, after a moment's reflection, began to write himself; but before he had penned six words he tore up the paper and flung it aside.

It was his intention to convey to Lady Dorothy Capel Cromwell's wish that she was for the present to consider herself practically a prisoner in her own house. As we know, Lady Dorothy was aware of this already; in fact, Rock had, through the medium

of one Gideon Sims, a farm bailiff on the estate, whom Rock hoped to enlist, for he was a man of thews, conveyed his chief's orders to Lady Dorothy, whom they reached through her maid, Polly Maple, and of a surety they had been bravely added to and edited before Polly Maple gave them to her mistress.

Maunsell anticipated no very great difficulty in carrying out his intention ; but by the time half a dozen sheets of paper had been torn up, and the points of as many quills destroyed, he began to realise what it meant ; and in doing so he began to realise another thing also, and something akin to despair seized upon the strong man.

It was seven years since he had last seen Dorothy Capel, a lanky girl of thirteen, and when a week ago he, for the first time during that interval, met her, he had in his mind the picture of the past, so that at first he could hardly realise that the child and the woman were one and the same.

The meeting, too, had been one of bitterness and scorn on the side of Dorothy. This was to be expected. Yet her high courage and her unflinching loyalty but added to the feelings which her

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beauty had inspired at the outset, unknown to himself, in the heart of the soldier; and now he realised for the first time what it was to love, and the disease is bad when it takes a man in his prime.

Suspense was intolerable, unendurable. It came to him with a rush to put his fate to the touch, and hear from her the yea or nay that would make or mar his happiness. He sprang from his chair, and began to pace the room in the restless habit he had acquired of late.

Finally he halted abruptly before an old Italian mirror, in a frame of silver filagree work, and what he saw there did not inspire him with confidence.

"Black Antony Maunsell they call you," he said, with a harsh laugh that rang strangely through the room; "and you dare hope—you!"

Clang! Clang!

He started like a guilty thing at the sound, and swung round. It was the little gilded jacquemart in the horologe that struck the hour, and it brought him to the moment. The time had passed like a dream. Hardly knowing what he was doing, he walked back to the table and began to write. This time there was no hesitation. But it was not

Cromwell's order that he conveyed to Dorothy. He wrote of himself, and for himself. He said what he had to say in a few brief, manly words, and then, addressing the letter, sealed it carefully, and holding it in his hand came forth from his room.

Along the hall and down the wide steps that led to the drive he went. Here his troop, which had been patiently waiting, came to attention as he appeared, and his black charger, almost asleep until now, began to paw and fret impatiently for the coming gallop. Once in the saddle, Maunsell turned to a trooper and handed him the note.

"For Lady Capel," he said. "See that it reaches her without fail, Hopkins."

"Any answer, Colonel?" asked Hopkins as he saluted.

"No! Stay—yes! There might be." And despite himself the Colonel felt the blood throbbing in his temples. "If there is one," he said, "keep it until my return—you need not bring it to me. We might miss each other else."

Then a sharp order to his men, and they were trotting down the drive to the park gates, leaving Hopkins gazing somewhat ruefully after them.

But presently his small blue eyes brightened, and he chuckled to himself as he led his horse back to the stable. He was, in truth, rejoicing at the hours of spare time he would have on his hands, and of the opportunity he had of getting speech with pretty Polly Maple, for there had been an old understanding between them, to which the wars had put an end for the time. So, the horse being unsaddled and made comfortable in his stall, Hopkins went back to the house with his letter. He had no intention of delivering it to anyone except Lady Dorothy herself, or to Mistress Maple, and first sought the servants' hall to seek for Polly. He waited some little time, but she did not appear, and Hopkins came forth determined to bide his opportunity; and, besides, the servants' hall was no comfortable place, for the tone of it was given by Mistress Battersby, the housekeeper, and a chill seemed to fall over the place on his entrance.

So out he went from that freezing atmosphere, and began to wander through the corridors of the vast and silent house, until he reached the west wing, and came to what was called "The Ladies' Gallery," from the portraits of fair dames that adorned its

walls. At the extreme end of this was a curtained doorway, the door half open.

Hopkins hesitated for a moment. The door, he knew, led to Lady Dorothy's apartments; but as he stopped, in doubt as to whether to proceed or turn back, he heard a cheerful voice singing, and his face broadened into a joyful smile. "My lady is out," he drawled to himself, "'tis Polly"; and without more ado he went forwards.

The Blue Room at Coombe Royal was Dorothy Capel's own boudoir, and it was here that Polly Maple, her maid and foster-sister, awaited her mistress's return.

Through all the wide country from Coombe to the vale of Hardenholt there was no maid with brighter eyes or rosier cheeks than Polly Maple, and this, in truth, was well known to herself. She could not count her suitors on the fingers of her pretty hands, but she played them off rarely one against the other, for Polly was not yet inclined to surrender the freedom of her girlhood. And yet she was not heart-whole. There was an old memory of one who now wore a soldier's breast-plate that came back often with an insistent force,

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but Polly brushed the thought of him away as a fly, and stepped into the wide embrasure of the bow window which lit the room, and gave access from a low balcony to the garden beyond. There she stood for a little, staring into the distance; but there was no sign of Dorothy, and with a little sigh Polly turned back, and, pulling together the heavy folds of a curtain covering a lancet arch that led into a bedroom beyond, began to arrange the little trifles scattered here and there about the room. Half unconsciously she began to sing, but the very sound of her own voice startled her. All was still and silent in the great house since the visitation had fallen upon them, and with this came the hot anger of a faithful retainer.

"It is shameful!" she burst out. "A prisoner in her own house! And that Colonel Maunsell—ugh!" and she shuddered. "He gives me a chill with his cold airs. Not like Sir Kit! but a 'Do this,' and a 'Do that,' as if he were Old Noll himself. He hath the evil eye, too, Gideon says, and he must needs bring here that sour-looking, one-eyed cornet, with his long-faced, psalm-singing, crop-haired Ironsides—ugh!"

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And then the thought of the breastplate, and of him who wore it, came back to her, and she stamped her little foot in anger.

"And Job Hopkins, too, among them! He that hath turned traitor to the King!" She turned round sharply as she spoke, and her self-reflections ended in a half-suppressed scream, for Job himself was standing before her, stiff as a pike.

Polly recovered herself in a moment.

"La! Is't thou, Job Hopkins?"

And redolent of the Puritan snuffle came back the answer, "Job Hopkins in the days of his darkness, mistress; but now, a brand plucked from the burning, behold Justified-by-Faith Hopkins, trooper in the Lord General's horse, whom the Gentiles call the Ironsides, and who are as a spur to the flank of the Philistines."

Polly looked at him as he drawled out his speech. He was a fine man withal, and the cuirass on his broad breast shone like silver. She would bring him to heel again for all his new robe of sanctity, and so she made him a bob-curtsey, and, imitating his manner, with her hands on the pockets of her apron, she drawled back:

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"Well, Master Spur-to-the-Flank-of-the-Philistine, or whatever you call yourself, what is your business here?" And with a sudden change of manner, "I mind the time that Job Hopkins, the keeper's son, would never have dared——"

For a moment Job was taken aback. "Mistress Maple——" he began, speaking in a natural tone; but she cut in upon him with her mocking drawl:

"Master——ahem——Justified-by-Faith Hopkins."

She was certainly a very pretty girl, and all the prettier as she stood there gibing at him. It was three years since the word had come to Job, and he had put aside the past as he thought, all except one relic that he never dared to look upon. And now all that past had come back to him in the few days he had been back again in his own country. He was a man after all, and undoubtedly Polly had grown prettier than ever. His far-set blue eyes twinkled with a new light. He gave a hasty glance behind him. There was no one looking, and, taking heart of grace, he made a step forwards.

"Polly!" he said.

"Mistress Maple, an't please thee," was the icy answer, and Job stood checked.

"I—I was saying——" he stammered, and then stopped.

"What?" asked Polly sharply.

"'Tis a fine afternoon," he blurted out, and Polly's white teeth showed for a moment under her red lips.

There was a little silence. Job's face got redder and redder, and Polly half turned from him, and began arranging the flowers.

At last he stammered, "Hast forgotten me, lass?"

CHAPTER V.

THE WOMAN OF BABYLON.

WITH provoking calmness, the girl gave a finishing touch to her flowers, as she replied carelessly :

"I mind me Job Hopkins, the keeper's son at Hardenholt, an honest King's man, and no Pound-head," and then with a sudden softening, as she saw him wince under her speech, she added, "I remember breaking a penny with him for luck—and—and—I have my half still."

"And I mine." With a step forwards, and a light in his eye, Hopkins was by her side, as he went on, "Dost remember, lass, those evenings three years back?"

Clearly, he was not one of those to whom an inch might be given. Polly put herself on the other side of the low table, and answered with a gibing snuffle :

"Recall not the days of thy darkness, master trooper?"

It was too much for Hopkins. "Let them come again!" he exclaimed recklessly, and slipping boldly up to Polly, tried to snatch a kiss. All this was as it should be; still Polly resisted with proper maidenly modesty; but Hopkins' arm was strong, if gentle, in its encircling fold around her waist, and at last, with a faint "Leave go!" she yielded.

For a moment Hopkins hesitated, and in that moment, by evil hap, Mistress Battersby, the house-keeper, entered the room, and stood in speechless anger and astonishment at the sight.

Job took a sounding kiss. "'Tis a carnal sin," he muttered, "but——"

"Thou graceless minx!"

Had a bolt from the blue fallen upon them the guilty pair could not have been more astonished. They flew apart like lightning, and Polly, red as a peony, stood fumbling with the pockets of her apron, whilst Job shuffled about uneasily, staring from one to the other with a shamefaced look upon him.

Mistress Battersby glared at them, a very dragon in her righteous anger. There was no

escape for the culprits. They were caught red-handed, and, after a moment's pause, the house-keeper turned once more on Polly.

"Thou graceless minx!" she repeated; "yesterday 'twas Gideon, the bailiff."

"He only——" stammered Polly, whilst Job's far-set eyes began to glimmer like those of an angry boar; but Mistress Battersby went on pitilessly, "And this very morning did I not see thee in the gallery with the Cornet Rock?"

"Cornet Rock!" Job could hardly believe his ears; but he turned a jealous and accusing eye on Polly.

"Yes, young man"—and Mistress Battersby turned on Hopkins, with an affectation of pity in her voice—"I am sorry for thee, for thou wert an honest fellow once."

Polly's face paled from red to white, and flushed red again with hot anger. The implication in the last charge was unfounded, and as false as it was malicious. It was true that the Cornet and Polly had met in the gallery, but the former had squeezed himself against the wall to let her pass, whilst Polly had tripped by him with a scornful toss of her head.

And to think that she should be accused of a flirtation with that one-eyed horror! Polly bit her lips, and then an inspiration came to her, and with ready wit she made attack for attack. With well-pretended confusion, she replied hastily:

"The Cornet but gave me a message for thee, Mistress. I did in truth forget it, nor can I recall it now!"

"Thou addlepate!"

"Ah, I remember," and, careless of further consequences, Polly continued, "He said his heart was breaking for love of thee. Hast any answer for me to bear?"

So swift and sudden was the attack, it had been pressed home so bravely, that Mistress Battersby was for the moment utterly unable to make any reply. Job and Polly exchanged one rapid glance, and the trooper's face expanded into a broad grin, whilst Polly stood with downcast eyes sure of her victory.

What passed in that moment of trial in Mistress Battersby's heart it is impossible to say; the keynote of her nature, vanity, had been struck with an unerring hand; but she would bandy no more words with this saucy girl.

"Begone, hussy!" she exclaimed, her voice shrill in its octave of anger, and Polly fled. There was a flutter of a skirt, one swift Parthian shaft from her eyes at Job, and she was gone.

And now the vials of the housekeeper's wrath were opened upon Job. "And thou! What dost here—ruining an honest girl's name?" Job was past all shame by this, and was as reckless as Polly. "'Twas but the kiss of peace, Mistress!" he said unctuously—"the kiss of peace!"

But he had reckoned without his host; and Mistress Battersby blazed out:

"Thou ribald scoffer! Hence! I shall report upon thee to the Cornet. What dost here, I ask? Hast any business, or hast wandered here like an ass in search of thistles?"

This was getting serious. 'A report to that martinet, the Cornet, meant trouble, as Hopkins well knew, and so he dropped his defiant air and, producing the Colonel's letter from the basket hilt of his sword, handed it to the housekeeper.

"The worshipful Colonel Maunsell bade me deliver this to Lady Capel."

"I will see that it reaches my lady in safety,

and now begone," and Job waited to hear no more.

Mistress Battersby placed the letter on a salver near the lounge, and then, passing through the curtains covering the lancet arch, she knocked at a closed door beyond, and, receiving no answer, returned.

"'Tis best to make sure," she said to herself. "My lady is not there, nor hath been seen for three hours," and then she took the liberty of seating herself to calm her feelings.

It had been a spirited passage of arms whilst it lasted, and as she came to think of it, Mistress Battersby was not quite sure that victory rested with her, though she remained in possession of the field. She was "all of a twitter," as she put it to herself, and it took some little time to compose herself. A good, kindly soul, still a very good-looking woman, and utterly faithful to the house she served, she possessed in no ordinary degree a vanity of temper that was easily played upon; so, as her ruffled plumage smoothed itself out, she began to be doubtful whether there was truth or not in Polly's statement. It was unspeakable impertinence on the Cornet's part—and here she

and his the Great Englishman would ever be this. Nevertheless, the Cornet was not satisfied in mind.

In truth, Rock was beginning to think that sufficient zeal was not being exercised in the search for the rebel on whose head there was so high a price.

It was true that the countryside was being scoured. It was true also that there was not a nook or cranny of the great house that had not been searched by men practised in the art of hunting down a foe; but there had been a want of severity in some things that was displeasing to Rock. His memory went back to the days gone by, when, with Mansfield and his free-riders, he had swept through Lauenburg and had taken the traitor Margrave, Francis Albert. The circumstances that ended in his capture were much the same as this, only no time would ever efface the marks of that visitation; and the Cornet, who was of opinion that war should be war, thought that a little of the same tonic Mansfield had given the good folk at Schloss Lauenburg would not be out of place here. He rose and tapped at the wainscoting with a long forefinger, as if expecting a

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secret door to fly open at his touch. None did so, and he stood, his finger resting on the dark oak, in silent commune with himself.

As he stood thus brooding, the galling thought came to him that they had failed in their enterprise, and, what was worse, that the knowledge of this failure would soon be with their great Captain. In his heart he began to reproach Maunsell. In some things Rock was far-seeing, and he had put this and that together, and came to the conclusion that the Colonel's zeal was not red-hot on his mission. More and more sour did the Cornet's face become as he thought of this. Of one thing he was sure—their man had not got off; and it would not be for want of effort on Rock's part that he would escape, if he did. Rock felt his professional reputation at stake. Was he, a veteran of thirty years and more of war, to be baulked like this? Not if he could help it. At last an idea came to him. He was in charge of the house. Why not make another, and a sudden, search through the building, with due and particular attention towards the wing occupied by Lady Capel?

Yes, the idea was good, and 'twere best carried

out at once. So, as he buckled on his sword, Rock muttered to himself, "What if he hath taken earth here? If so, there is but one hiding-place for him, and if there?" The Cornet tapped the shining hilt of his sword, and, laughing grimly to himself, stepped forth from the room.

He made straight for the west wing, and for Dorothy's apartments. Now that he had marked out his course, and taken his heart in both hands, there was nothing that would stay him; but even as he went, the vast deserted galleries, and the chill silence of the empty rooms, filled him with evil foreboding; and he cursed himself for a puling child as the echo of his own footfall startled him. At last he reached the Ladies' Gallery, and as he glanced to the right and left of him at the row of fair women, whose portraits hung on the walls, he seemed to feel their haughty glance withering him as he passed; but still he kept on, snarling with anger at his own weakness, and smarting under a sense of defeat. But if it were possible—if man could win—Rock meant to win now.

At last he came to the Blue Room, the door was half open still. He hesitated for a moment,

and then stepped in softly. As he did so, he caught sight of the figure of Mistress Battersby, still wrapt in her day dream.

"Lady Dorothy!" he muttered, and stepped back as softly as he had entered. All his courage seemed to ooze out of his finger tips, at the thought of a passage of arms with a woman. But shame came to his aid. He would not go back; and mustering all his courage, and looking more forbidding than ever, he marched into the room, with a loud "*Ahem!*" and found himself face to face with one of whom he stood in greater awe than even the Mistress of Coombe Royal.

As for Mistress Battersby, it is sufficient to say that never was woman more astonished. A wild thought came to her vain mind that Polly had informed the Cornet where she was to be found, as a sort of peace offering, and she stood there, curtsying to Rock, blushing like a schoolgirl, half angry and half pleased.

And Rock was no whit less disconcerted. He shifted from one leg to the other, and, making a profound bow, began, "Your servant, mistress—I——"

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"Sir!" interrupted Mistress Battersby, "these are my lady's apartments—to think of your coming here——"

The matter had to be faced, and, Mistress Battersby or not, the Cornet's duty lay before him. So, though his heart quaked, he drew himself up stiffly.

"Mistress," he said, "I have come here, being well aware——"

"Oh, the hussy!" exclaimed Mistress Battersby, and the Cornet stared at her in astonishment. He thought darkly that perhaps there was guilt in this confusion, and the thought gave him strength. He made a step forwards.

"I have come," he said, "to seek——"

But poor Mistress Battersby's fluttering brain could think of nothing except the one idea that lay nearest her heart.

"I know, Cornet," she said hastily. "But not here. You men are so rash! Meet me this evening in my own parlour!"

Rock went back the step he had taken forwards. Was this a lunatic he had before him?

"Mistress, I—I——"

G

But he could not finish his speech. A white shapely hand was on his sleeve.

"'Tis impossible here, Cornet. My lady may be back any minute; but to-night there will be a pasty and a bottle of Gascony wine, such as a soldier loveth."

Rock was in speechless amaze and anger. In trying to free himself, he placed his hand on Mistress Battersby's restraining fingers, only to feel the warm clasp of her hand in return. A cold sweat came over him.

Angry words he would have faced. The clash of steel would have been welcome—but this!

"Do I dream?" he gasped.

"Nay, indeed! 'Twill be no dream, and 'twill be sack if thou lovest it better than Gascon wine."

"Oh!" groaned Rock, and even as he did so Mistress Battersby's still fair head fell gently on his shoulder, as with half-closed eyes she murmured:

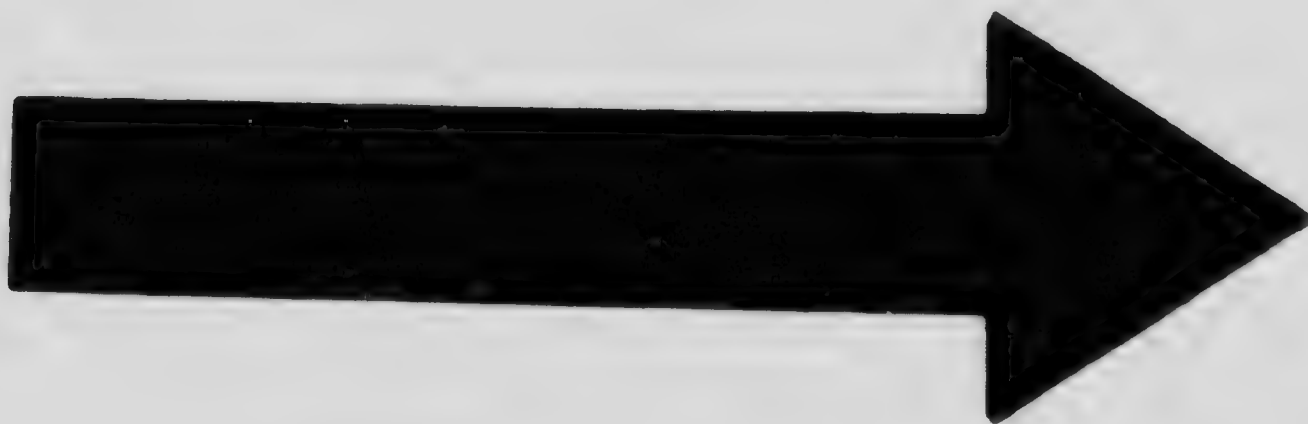
"Oh, Cornet! Cornet!"

With a smothered cry of horror and despair Rock strove to free himself. "Thou Delilah!

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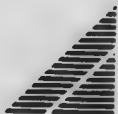
Unhand me!" he exclaimed. "Yea, I will flee!
Even as Joseph fled! Avaunt thee! thou Woman
of Babylon!"

With this he tore himself from her grasp
and fled, with rage and terror imprinted on his
countenance.



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CHAPTER VI.

IN THE BLUE ROOM.

IN the summer twilight Dorothy Capel sat at the bow window in the Blue Room, a crumpled paper in her hand. It was Maunsell's letter, and it had been read at first with astonishment, and then with hot anger. After what Harden had told her this was not unexpected; indeed, she had been dimly conscious of Maunsell's feelings towards her before, a knowledge of these things coming by instinct to her sex. Then, too, Harden had unmasked his kinsman to her, and, quick and impulsive, she felt it was an intolerable insult that the man should have said what he had.

"How dare he?" she burst forth. "How dare he write this?" And then, as if to add fuel to her anger, she read the note once more.

"It is too much!" and, springing up, she laughed out scornfully. "The love of an honourable man.

Honourable, indeed! Such honour as a traitor to his King and the robber of his kinsman's inheritance may hold. Oh, Kit, you were right!" She made as if she would tear the paper to fragments, but something stayed her. Perhaps it was that secret pride of conquest which every woman has at heart that refrained her—no man can tell.

Be this as it may, the letter was not scattered to the four winds of heaven, but it was read again, and yet again, and on each occasion of its reading with less and less of the fierce sense of wrong that at first possessed her. Stiff and formal in its expression, there was nothing in the words, which seemed to be held back by a great restraining power, that any woman might be ashamed to listen to. It was all, of course, utterly impossible, but—and the train of her thoughts was interrupted by a slight noise at the door.

In a moment the letter was in a pocket of her dress; but it was only a servant, after all, who came to light the candles in the rarely wrought candelabra, the work of no less a hand than Benvenuto Cellini. They had been gifts to a past lord of Capel by Francis of France, and they stood now in all their

matchless beauty in the mellow radiance of the lights.

The man went at last, and Dorothy, stepping up to the light, read her letter again, and this time something stirred her, and her lips parted in a half-amused smile.

"Each word stands as stiff and straight as one of his own dragoons, and it might be one of those empty suits of armour in the Long Gallery stepping forth to offer his love. He begs permission to wait on me—well, I shall see him and give him his answer! I fear, though, that Colonel Antony Maunsell will not enjoy the interview."

With this she put the letter back once more into her pocket, and touched the bell. In a little space Polly appeared.

"Tell Colonel Maunsell that I await him here."

"M'Lady." Polly turned to go, and then stopped in hesitation.

"What is it, Maple?"

Polly came back. "Oh, M'Lady, they have returned empty-handed, and 'tis said that Sir Christopher hath escaped."

A glad look came into Dorothy's eyes. It was

something to know that Kit was still free, and her plan would work itself out. If Polly's tale was true that the Roundheads believed their quarry had escaped, they would in all probability go too, and Harden would be safe, and could lie in Coombe Royal in security with faithful hearts around him, until opportunity came for him to flee to France.

"Who told you, Polly?"

"Job, M'Lady—Job Hopkins; he that was the keeper's son at Hardenholt, and is now an Ironside. But he said, too, that the Cornet was set on searching the house once more."

Dorothy's heart sank within her. In an hour at most Kit would be here, and, if this was true, all was lost. And yet no soul, not even Polly, knew of Harden's expected coming. If the news was true, Harden must be warned at once—but how? Her mind seemed to reel within her; but Polly's next words came with a relief unspeakable.

"Yes, M'Lady, the Cornet was bent on searching the house, and made known his wish to the Colonel. But the latter forbade him, and Job says there were high words between them, and that the Cornet hath been ordered to his quarters."

At any other time Dorothy might have stopped to think of this strange change of front on the part of the Colonel, but for the moment her only sense was one of relief at the threatened danger averted. It gave time, and time was everything now. But Polly must be told that Harden would be here soon, and—there was Maunsell to see. That must be got over first, and then she would tell her foster-sister and maid.

"Go, Polly. Give my message to Colonel Maunsell."

"Yes, M'Lady!" and Polly was gone.

Five minutes passed—ten minutes passed, and Dorothy stood outwardly calm, but inwardly with her nerves at highest tension. In that brief time, however, her maid's statement that Maunsell had forbidden Rock's plan of searching the house came back once more to her mind; and with it came the thought that, knowing what she did of Maunsell's feelings towards her, it might be possible to lead him on with false hopes, and gain a further advantage for Harden's escape; but she was a Capel, and the thought was banished almost on the moment that it came. Come what may, this was impossible

—there could be nothing between her and the Colonel but war, open and undisguised.

Now came a firm, steady step in the gallery outside, a knock at the door, and the next moment Colonel Antony Maunsell was in the room.

He carried his plumeless hat in his hand, and the sombre richness of his attire was well suited to his tall, straight figure. Altogether it was a presence calculated to command notice, and perhaps to overawe a little ; and this was increased by the gravity of his countenance, a haughty severity of feature, that was, however, lit and softened by the straight, true look in the eyes. Dorothy felt all this instinctively, and felt, too, despite Harden's warning, that here was a man who, even if an enemy, could be nothing but a brave and generous one. Yet the very thought that she was making this unwilling concession in her heart moved her to hot anger at herself, and hardened her in her bitterness. It was an awkward moment, and, after the first formal bow he made was returned with the barest inclination, Maunsell stood silent before the tall, slight, fair-haired girl, who looked at him with such chill indifference ; and whose greeting was like ice.

Truly it was a strange courtship! Even as he stood there, Black Tony felt his cause was lost.

"I await Colonel Maunsell's pleasure." The voice might have come from an iceberg; and the strong man felt his last hope founder utterly.

There was a look of pain in the dark eyes, and Dorothy felt that she had drawn first blood, though the look haunted her long after.

"I have come," he began, "for my answer. You know what it means to me."

"Indeed! You give my intelligence too much credit, I fear." She would not meet his look as she spoke, and with a quick movement she rested her hand on the back of the lounge near her, and began nervously pulling at the gold tassel of a cushion.

Maunsell's embarrassment increased. He had, however, seen her pale as he spoke, and that the hand resting on the lounge shook like an aspen leaf, and his heart smote him.

"I—I will come another time," he stammered, and then, as he floundered into deeps beyond him, "You are looking tired—will you not sit down?"

Dorothy meant him to drink the hemlock to the dregs. "I prefer to stand," she said; and then,

"but you do right to offer me a seat in Coombe Royal—you, its new master."

The words were bitter and cruel, and scarce had they left her lips when she would have given her right hand to recall them. They stung like a lash, and Maunsell flushed hotly; but his strength came back to him.

"You are unjust and unkind," he said in grave reproach.

She felt it herself; but this man was a victorious enemy; and more, he was hunting to death the man she loved, and the sense of injury and wrong was hot within her. It was in her power now to make Maunsell rue the day he ever crossed her path, and, though she felt there was something pulling her back, she would not abate one jot of the punishment she had in her hands to inflict. So there was one swift, scornful glance of the blue eyes, as she answered:

"If this is all you have to say, perhaps this interview might end. You have, I think, had your answer."

"Ay!" he said, "I have." And now there was a pause, in which the silence was almost more

intolerable to either than speech. Maunsell turned to go; and then, as if unwilling to abandon all hope without one more struggle, faced her once more, his low, deep voice vibrating with the passion in his heart. All the stiff formality that might have become a grandee of Spain had gone. He was a very man now, pleading for what was to him more than life, and Dorothy Capel felt each word ring true; but she hardened her heart against him, and as he ended she said, "Colonel Maunsell, you seem to forget that in a matter like this a woman does not only need to love, but to honour where she loves."

Again the bronze on his cheek grew darker as he answered, "You have no right to say that last thing—my honour is clean."

She liked him all the better for this quick touch of anger. The cold, hard flint could strike fire, and, high-spirited as she was, Dorothy was almost afraid of the spark she had drawn; but there was no going back, and he had to be crushed, and utterly crushed.

"Your honour!" There was unspeakable bitterness in her tone. "Your honour! You—traitor to your King, and traitor to your kin!"

She had worked herself to high, blazing wrath

by this, and stood before him, a delicate, fragile woman, with all the spirit of her knightly ancestors shining from her eyes. She had struck with all her strength now, and the blow had gone home. She made a movement as if to go herself; but Mannsell's voice, and an unconscious tone of command in it, arrested her.

"Hear me!" he said. "I must right myself in this to you; and not even from you will I hear a word against my honour. 'Tis true I took up arms against Charles Stuart. I did so with all that England holds her best and bravest. Think you it was nothing to break from those I loved, to follow my conscience, and to throw in my lot with those who wished England free? I was no traitor to the King! As for my kinsman—granted that Hardenholt is mine—I did but save it from passing into strange hands, when Harden had diced away his honour and his patrimony."

Kit Harden was right. The man was a deadly foe after all; and would shrink at nothing to gain his ends; but she had not calculated on such pitiful meanness as that of slandering his absent kinsman, and she blazed forth.

"And you seek to confirm your hold by hunting him to death! Could you not trust that hangman's work to other hands?"

"I would indeed 'twere in other hands. Unworthy as Harden is, he is my kinsman, and we were friends until——"

"Ah! Do not hesitate, Colonel Maunsell! Your kinsman is not here to defend himself, and I am but a woman."

"No!" he said, "I will not hesitate now. I have gone too far—we were friends, I say, till he forfeited his honour, and no honest man could call him friend."

"You! You dare say that!"

"Ay! More's the pity! But it is not that which urges me on against him. I am but a servant of the State. I have my duty."

"And I mine, to aid him with all my strength! For I am Harden's promised wife. You coward, to abuse an absent man!"

It was all over. There was not a straw of hope left to which Maunsell could cling. He half turned his face from her for a moment, and then met her look once more.

"As God is my witness, I did not know this thing. Forgive me! And forget what I have said."

She made no answer, and he left her standing there, her fingers idly tearing at the tassel. So as she stood, there came through the open window a confused murmur of voices, and then a cheer.

In a flash it came to her overwrought mind that Harden was captured, and that his foemen were exulting in their triumph.

"Oh, Kit!" she gasped, "they have taken you!"

And then the brave heart gave way for once, and she sank on a seat sobbing like a child.

CHAPTER VII.

KNAVE AGAINST KNIGHT.

WHEN Patience's ready wit had put off Tutbury and his men, and they hastened away to search the distant moorland, there was one amongst them who doubted her in his heart for reasons of his own. We saw him, Mauley, as he crossed the bridge last of all, bringing down, in idle humour, clusters of wild flowers with long sweeps of his sword. Finally he desisted, wiped the blade on the sleeve of his buff coat, and followed sullenly in the rear rank. Fierce as Peter Mauley's zeal was in the cause, there was yet another if a secondary element in his nature, which sometimes overpowered the first, and this was the avarice of gold. And there was gold to be had here; and Mauley meant, if possible, to win for himself the whole reward offered for the capture of Harden.

He knew, what no one else knew, that it was no foot of woman that had trodden the turf near

the thickets. Had he but lifted his voice then Harden was lost ; but this meant the sharing of the blood-money with the others.

And so, with low cunning, he held himself still, and passively aided Patience for his own sake.

Alone of all those there, he had read her like a book, because he knew of that one generous deed of Harden's in the past ; and he had meant to get the others away, stay back himself, and make the arrest. But this was impossible, so as he went brooding along he began to reflect that if he returned suddenly to the spot where they had left Patience he would not find her alone.

But to obtain permission to return, it was necessary to take Tutbury into his confidence, and—galling thought—to share the spoil with him. But a half share was better than a sixth, and so he made up his mind.

When they had gone about half a mile, Tutbury called a halt ; and divided his men into two parties. One was to make a long detour to the west, and the other, consisting of Mauley and himself—there were but six men all told—was to go straight forwards. The stronger party was to divide

itself again into two sections of two each, and cut off any retreat, as far as they were able, by the north and west. On the east no attempt could be made, as Coombe Royal lay there, and it was full of hostile men, and watch and ward was kept far beyond the park limits.

When the first party had gone, Tutbury and Mauley went forward doggedly, side by side, until at last the latter broke silence.

"Sergeant! a thousand pounds is a rare sum of money."

Tutbury grunted in answer, as Mauley went on: "Even half of it would make thee or me a rich man."

"What wool art gathering? Onwards—we have still far to go."

"Wool of price, Sergeant! Wool of price! I tell thee 'twere worth that thousand pounds to me, except that there must be two in this business. Yea, Thomas Tutbury! Not in vain am I named Lie-as-a-Bear-in-Wait-for-the-Heathen! 'Tis you, not I, who go to gather thistle-down for wool."

Tutbury stopped, and turned on his comrade. "Speak not in riddles," he said; "make thy mean-

For a moment the Sergeant stood leaning on his sword. His bullet head dropped between his shoulders, and his far-set eyes cast a keen and searching glance at Mauley. At last he made up his mind.

"Ay! thou art right. 'Tis thou shouldst have been sergeant, not I; and 'twill be share and share alike—here's my hand on't."

And then they parted, each to go their arranged ways. What happened to Mauley we know. How, after finding further trace of the fugitive, he reached the forest glade to meet Maunsell there, and got carried away, as the others were, by the burst of religious frenzy that had come upon Burnside.

There we will leave him for the present, and follow the track of Sergeant Tutbury, as with unbated breath he hastened to the forest, and followed a winding pathway that seemed to lead into its very deeps. He went forward cautiously, taking cover like the old soldier he was, and peering into the grey shadows with his keen searching eyes. The sunset lit the tree trunks till they shone like bronze, and the long shafts of light that penetrated the gloom seemed only to accentuate the darkness.

Now and again a gnarled tree took the shape and form of man, and hope would rise in Tutbury's breast, only to be banished a moment later. Sometimes a bough moving in the breeze, as its leaves swept across the shadows, seemed to conceal a fleeting figure behind it; but it was the fancy of his strained eyes, and that was all. The gentle wind sighed mournfully in the leaves overhead, the lights grew more ruddy and the shadows darker. The pathway itself faded off into nothingness, and at last it began to dawn on Tutbury that he knew not north from south, or east from west, and that to all intents and purposes he was lost.

He made a cast backwards to try and get a glimpse of the sun; but the sun had set, and the impenetrable wall of trees made it impossible for him to see the fire girdle in the west. But a summer twilight was taking the place of the red sun, and he could see the faint silver sheen of a glorious moon that strove with the twilight, and that later on would bathe the night in its splendour. All this the old soldier saw; but gave them not a thought. He was smarting at the thought that he had lost his way, and was wandering like a lost babe, while

Mauley was perhaps within arm's length of the rebel. His bullet head drooped in the strange way he had when puzzled or thinking, and then suddenly he squared himself and started forwards. He had taken his chance of going straight on ahead, come what may.

He had decided on this at blind venture—and that venture was to succeed. Scarce had he gone a hundred paces when he saw something flit between the open space between two elms, and then was lost to view at once. It was no waving bough, no fancy of his imagination on this occasion. Full and fair he saw it, not a bow-shot away, and even in that shadowy twilight he was sure it was a man, and, if so, it was the man he sought.

He put himself to the run. The turf was soft and heavy, but he had not gone twenty paces ere he realised that the noise of his footfalls would reach the other's ears, and then pursuit would be useless. So he slackened to a long, rapid stride, and cautiously approached the elms. Once behind the cover of their trunks he peered out in the direction the man had taken. The forest seemed to open out like a fan there, and it was not so deep or

dense as that behind him. At first he made out nothing ; but just as he was about to advance once more, and follow the direction the figure had taken, he saw it once again, and this time there was absolute certainty. The plumed hat, the short cloak falling over the shoulder, and the flash of the drawn rapier in his hand, was enough for Tutbury. It was Harden himself—and at last he was run to earth.

Slowly and deliberately the Cavalier crossed the open space. He was too far for a pistol shot, else Tutbury would have risked it, uncertain as the light was, and he was too far for a sudden rush to succeed. The stalk was not yet over, but the end was at hand. Tutbury watched him as he crossed the glade, waiting for an opportunity for Harden's back to be turned on him ere he made another step forwards, when he saw the Cavalier suddenly gather himself together like a buck, and spring forwards. There was a faint distant "thud!" as of a body alighting with some force on earth, and Harden was again lost to view.

So quickly did this happen that for a second Tutbury scarce believed his eyes. Then he realised,

and, with a snarl, sprang forwards, and raced this time till he reached the spot where Harden had vanished from view. Here the forest stream took a loop in its windings, and Harden had leaped it as it came in his path.

As he looked at the width of the stream a half-unconscious exclamation of admiration burst from Tutbury. He was himself an athlete of rare powers, but this was something far beyond him. The sergeant could see from the steep bank that the slow-moving water was deep here, so he took to it like an otter, and in a few strokes was on the opposite shore. As he pulled himself up the bank he saw the pathway Harden had made for himself in the grass immediately before him, and followed it at a quick but cautious pace. Suddenly he found himself almost outside the belt of trees round him, and as he halted in hesitation as to the course he should take, he saw before him a stretch of open country, whilst on his right a long arm of the forest reached out to the very walls of Coombe Royal itself, whose vast purple silhouette, with Kenelm's Tower high above all, stood solidly out against the evening sky. And there in front of him, as if he had stopped to

admire the scene, stood Harden himself, out in the full open. He stood with his back to Tutbury, facing Coombe Royal, and twice the latter covered him with his pistol, and twice put it down. Harden was out of range. Tutbury shook his head, and slipped the pistol back into his belt. There was no other course open to him but to gain a few yards by a stealthy stalk, and then to rush his man. Harden was absorbed in contemplation of the scene before him. He was fanning himself lazily with his hat, and Tutbury saw the glint of the evening on his fair hair. Slowly and cautiously the sergeant moved forwards, pistol in hand, when there came a faint, crackling noise from under his foot. He had stepped upon a dry twig. Tutbury was still in the cover, and he dropped on his face like lightning, hoping that the sound would not reach his man—it was, after all, so faint and slight. He peered from the darkness to see the effect of his blunder, and swore a bitter oath under his breath, for Harden had turned sharply round, and was facing him. Those trained powers of his, sensitive as those of a stag, had heard the sudden snapping of the twig, and felt the deathly stillness that followed. To

Tutbury's joy he made a step forwards as if he was about to advance and look further into the place whence the sound had come, but as suddenly he swung round again, and moved forwards right across the open, in the direction of Coombe Royal.

Now a portion of this strip of forest curved round in a half-circle, and Harden was making for the head of this. He was in no hurry, but walked on as if he was taking the air. If Tutbury could but reach the spot before Harden the latter was a lost man. Slowly and cautiously he rose, still keeping in the shadow. With a quick eye he took his bearings, and then, moving back into the forest, started off at a long trot. From these deeps no ordinary sound could reach Harden's ears, and so he let himself go freely. Strong beyond most men, and tough as whipcord, Tutbury rapidly covered the ground; but as now and then he took a quick, searching glance at Harden, he saw that the latter, though still walking along carelessly, had increased his pace, and despite Tutbury's effort was certain to reach the head of the curve before he did. And this, in effect, happened, so that when the sergeant came up

Harden had disappeared, and all that he saw before him was a small pathway along the edge of the long stretch of forest. Tutbury stepped out into the open, and stooped to examine the pathway. As he did so there was a rustle in the bushes to the right, and Harden was before him, sword in hand.

"So, dog! I have you at last!"

It was Harden who spoke. Quick as thought Tutbury raised his pistol and pulled the trigger, but the hammer fell with a harmless click, and Harden stood smiling at him.

"Now, my man, 'tis my turn." And his rapier shot out like a snake's tongue, hitting Tutbury full and fair over the heart. Well was it for the sergeant that his breastplate was good and true! The rapier glanced off to the side with a rasping hiss, but when Harden had recovered his guard Tutbury was armed, too, and his good sword was in his hand. There were centuries of hatred in that contest. On the one side was the slight, lithe-limbed aristocrat, cool and contemptuous, with a deadly smile on his face, and his long, fair Cavalier locks—he had cast aside his hat and cloak—framing his high, proud features in gold. Facing him was a splendid son of

the people, bullet-headed and broad-shouldered, with muscles of tempered steel, a veteran of a hundred fights, an adversary to whom to give the slightest chance was to lose the game.

They stood facing each other for a space, warily watching each other's eyes, and it seemed that the red afterglow of the sunset grew brighter so as to cast more light upon that death-struggle, for one of the two would sleep his long, last sleep in Coombe Woods that night.

Then there came a grating clash, and the swords had met, and another and a deadly thrust of Harden's had been parried by the skill of a master. Quick as thought the thrust was repeated, and as quickly was it parried again. Harden's face assumed an expression of amused wonder. He had thought to kill this man at the first pass; but the trooper with the clumsy sword in his hand, and his iron nerve, had foiled him twice, and now there came a whizzing cut, so swift and rapid that, but for Harden's cat-like spring back, he had been lost.

"Faith!" he laughed, "thou art a very paladin. Where didst thou gain thy skill, clod?"

"On thee and thine," came the answer, "whom

God had placed as a pestilence in our land. From Chalgrove Field to Worcester hath this good sword quenched its thirst."

"'Tis a long score to settle, and I had thought to spare thee, clod." And with this the rapier came in again, with a thrust in tierce, that seemed to change in its passage, and, passing swiftly under Tutbury's guard, again struck his corslet with a sharp cling. An oath burst from Harden. He had all but been taken on the riposte. Had his adversary been armed with a rapier it was all over with him then, but the clumsy sword had saved him. It was the weapon, and not the man behind it, that gave him life then. He sprang back again with all the agility he possessed, but this time he was hot and panting.

"Where didst thou get that breastplate?" he asked, leaning in apparent carelessness on his point, as if he felt he was out of reach.

"'Twas forged by honest English hands, at an English anvil," was the answer, as Tutbury, too, lowered his blade, for the weight of the weapon, which he had to use half as a rapier, was beginning to tell even upon his iron wrist.

though the great muscles were failing, and he felt his heart throbbing with the hot blood rushing to and from it, he still held on.

But the end was at hand. Swifter and swifter grew the thrusts of that slender blade. The parries became weaker and weaker. Tutbury had been ripped on the forehead, and the blood almost blinded him. Another thrust was coming, and he tried to imitate Harden's former tactics and spring back, and in the attempt exposed his side.

The next moment he had thrown up his arms with a sob. The heavy sword dropped to earth with a thud, and, spinning round once, Sergeant Tutbury fell. Harden's blade had found the joint in his corslet and passed clean through him, and Thomas Tutbury had fought his last fight.

Kit Harden stood over the body, his dripping rapier in his hand. As he did so the fallen man made a convulsive movement. Some indistinct words came from his twitching lips, and then there was a rush of blood from the mouth, a shuddering of the strong limbs, and he was gone.

Not a ray of pity for a brave man dead warmed the icy heart of the victor.

"This—thing—had better rest here," he muttered to himself, and then, with a laugh, as he touched the body with his foot, "Triple fool to think to hold Harden of Hardenholt!"

With this he carefully cleaned his blade in the grass, feeling the edge and point with his hand. Then he took up his hat and cloak, and stepped once more into the forest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HAND OF A FRIEND.

IT was Polly Maple, who found her mistress in her despairing mood, and gave her good cheer with the tidings that it was not Harden's capture, but the news of the almost immediate coming of the Lord Protector that had caused those ringing shouts of joy, which brought with them such evil foreboding to Dorothy's heart.

But the revulsion of feeling affected her almost as much as the shock of her first suspicions, and Dorothy's white lips and shaking limbs told their own story. So Polly, whose own bright eyes were dim with tears for her foster-sister, arose and fled light-footed from the room, returning as quickly as she had gone with some wine, which she pressed upon her mistress.

Dorothy had barely set the glass down from her lips, and felt the warmth of the generous wine,

when there came a sharp, tinkling sound at the window, as if a small pebble had struck the glazing.

The two women started and looked at each other. There was a moment's silence, then came another pebble, and Polly read the meaning of it all in her mistress's eyes.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a gesture of despair "and with Cromwell here, too!"

But her high courage had come back to Dorothy. She ran to the window and looked out, and, as she looked, a dim figure moved in the shadows of the shrubbery, and then flitted across the moonlight path below her.

"Kit!" she said in a low voice. "Here! To me!"

There was a slight crunching noise on the gravel, and the next moment Harden sprang lightly in at the window, and she felt her hands in his warm clasp.

"Here at last!" he said. "But for the luck of Harden, that ever follows me, there would have been an end to it all an hour ago," and then, as he caught sight of Polly, he went on in his cheery way, "What, little Maple! Why so pale? Hast seen a ghost?"

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With this, he placed his hat and gloves on the low table, and, turning to Dorothy, said, "And now, lady mine, the rest is in your hands."

Dorothy had pulled the curtains of the window together as he spoke, but his words brought home to her the new danger that had arisen since she made her forlorn plan. But for Cromwell's coming there had been fair chance of success—but now! Yet there was no going back, and it was win all or lose all now.

"Kit," she said, "there is the secret chamber in Kenelm's Tower, where many have lain in security before now. A passage leads to it from my room. You must lie there, and the secret will rest with Polly and myself."

He nodded, and would have said something; but his speech was checked, as there came to them through the night the roll of kettledrums that rose and fell with the wind, but rose each time with an ever-increasing volume of sound, approaching nearer and nearer each moment.

"Why! what is that?" exclaimed Harden, and the two women answered in a breath:

"'Tis Cromwell himself. He is coming here."

"What! Noll himself! Faith, they hunt me as if I were a Royal stag!" He walked to the decarter, and, pouring himself out a bumper, held it in his hand, and listened to the insistent rumbling, as it grew nearer and yet more near. So for a moment he stood, a smile on his lips, and then, raising his glass at arm's length above him, he called out defiantly: "Here's to the King, and thy damnation, Noll!"

With this he drained the wine, and flung the delicate crystal from him into the fireplace, where it broke into a hundred tinkling fragments.

And even as he did so there came a tumult of voices from the courtyard, and there was the continuous bustle and tramp of hurrying feet—the danger had come indeed now, almost in visible presence.

"Quick, Kit!" exclaimed Dorothy. "Here, with me!" And Harden snatched up his hat, and followed her through the lancet arch. There, in the upper room, was a small alcove, that might have been used as an oratory, and, indeed, was originally intended for that purpose, although it concealed a secret passage beyond. Entering the alcove,

Dorothy twice pressed at a spring, but it refused to work, and now Polly ran hurriedly into the room.

"There is someone coming," she said, all white with terror.

Harden turned fiercely, as if to go back, but Dorothy restrained him.

"Go back, Polly. Whoever it is, detain him! Say I am at my toilet—anything—but detain him till I come; go, girl!"

As Polly fled back, she pressed the spring once more with all her strength, and this time a door slid back, showing a flight of stone steps, that wound upwards into the inky darkness.

"Come," she said, entering the passage, and Harden followed her. Up they went along the worn stone steps of the dark stairway, stumbling onwards, with no light to guide their footsteps, until at last a thin band of moonlight gleamed through a lozenge in the wall.

This faint white strip of light was just sufficient to enable them to make out the face of a heavily studded door, and here Dorothy stopped, and whispered to Harden to draw back the bolt.

He did so, with an effort that taxed even his strength, and as he forced the massive oak back upon its creaking hinges, there appeared before them a small vaulted room, where the darkness was only rendered the more intense by a faint ray glimmering through the aperture in the wall.

In this oblong slit, which served to give a meagre light and a little air to the dungeon, for it was nothing else, an owl was sitting. For a moment, the bird looked down upon the intruders with fierce, staring eyes, and then, with a dismal hoot and a sullen flapping of his great wings, flew off into the night.

"'Tis a dreadful place," said Dorothy with a shudder.

"I am indeed a prisoner," replied Harden, and from the passage below there came back a harsh mocking echo—"Prisoner!"

The malign mockery, the stony ring in that voice of air, fell upon them both with evil foreboding, for these were times when the bravest put faith in things we scoff at now, and yet, perhaps, fear in our hearts; but Harden, with a certain affectation of bravado, called back:

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"Thou art a false prophet!" And the echo answered "Prophet!"

For a little they stood in silence, and then Dorothy spoke. "No more!" she said, "else you might be heard. This is no prison, Kit; but a safe refuge. Here no soul will search, and here you will rest secure till they have gone."

"I know, lass," said Harden, "'tis but an echo, though an ugly one," and, unclasping his cloak, he placed it, together with his hat, on a small stone seat that jutted out from the wall near him, and then uttered a low exclamation of annoyance.

"What is it?" asked Dorothy.

"Only that my wits must have fled. I forgot my gloves in my haste to get here. I left them on the table where I placed my hat, and they would tell a tale were they found."

"They are safe enough there, and I shall bring them to you at once," said Dorothy bravely, though she well knew the danger to which that slight error exposed them. "And now, Kit," she added, "I must go at once; there is no fear, you are safe here."

Bravely and cheerily as she spoke, her heart was aching, and Harden understood. That whole-

souled and loyal love, that unflinching courage had had their effect. Already in the past few hours Harden had felt the mute reproaches of a long-numbed and almost dead conscience, and from the far deeps of his unworthy heart it flashed upon him yet another and a last signal, that showed him to himself the evil thing he was. The pity of it was that, with all his gifts, he possessed a nature which, like Reuben's, was as unstable as water. No seal could ever mark it with its impress, and all his generous emotions were but for the moment, and then he slid downwards, on his cold and selfish path, a living personification of the motto of his house, Harden for Harden.

But, for the present, he was stirred—as once before on this day his ready tongue failed him, and he stood silent and hesitating before this girl, who had shown him how great a woman's love could be. Suddenly he put his hand on her shoulders; but kept his face from her eyes.

"God bless you!" he said thickly; "and now go—leave me!" And thus they parted. Harden listened to the light footsteps, growing lighter and fainter, as they descended the darksome passage,

until he heard the distant sound of a closing door. Then, with a muttered oath, he flung himself down on the stone seat, his drawn sword by his side, and so waited with his thoughts for his companions. And thus we will leave him, and follow Dorothy.

As she regained her room, Dorothy found herself face to face with her foster-sister. The girl was white and shaking with fear, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she found voice to whisper the news: that Cromwell was come, and that Colonel Maunsell awaited Dorothy in the Blue Room on business which he said would take no denial.

Those tell-tale gloves! If Maunsell's eyes had fallen on them, things were indeed hopeless! And so, with a brief "Stay here!" to Polly, and a beating heart, Dorothy passed through the lancet arch to meet Maunsell, and to know the worst.

The Colonel stood, hat in hand, near the window, and in the quick glance she cast around Dorothy saw to her joy that the gloves still lay on the small table, almost concealed by the profusion of flowers that drooped around the vase near them. Hope returned to her, and, with the faintest possible

bow, she stepped forward, placing herself close to the table, and covering it from Maunsell's view, as she asked coldly :

"Sir, may I ask the reason for this intrusion?"

His salute had been as stiff and formal as her own ; but from where she stood Dorothy saw how set and drawn his face was ; and there was a strange, harsh ring in Maunsell's voice as he said abruptly :

"I have come, Madam, to inform you that His Highness the Lord Protector has arrived."

As he spoke she rested her hand lightly on the table, close, very close to the gloves, and now she broke in upon his speech with bitter words, hoping to distract his attention, whilst she gained possession of the evidence of Harden's presence in Coombe Royal. "You will be able to play the host to the regicide in Coombe Royal ; his coming here does not concern me in the least," she said, and whilst she spoke she deftly picked up the gloves, holding her hand behind her as she launched forth her stinging words ; but Maunsell took no notice of her speech, and continued in the same set manner :

"I am desired to express His Highness's commands that you will present yourself before him

to-night in the great hall, where he gives audience." All the hot blood rose within her in fierce anger at the speech, and manner in which it was delivered, and the glance she shot at him flashed like an angry blade. Long years past, when blood was shed under the petals of the Red Rose and the White a former mistress of Coombe Royal had struck down, for less than this, an insulting victor with the dagger she wore at her girdle, and the blood and spirit of Dame Audrey Capel still lived in her descendant.

"I will not come," she flashed back defiantly ;
"and now go. My answer is final."

He made no movement, and looked hard at her as she spoke, but there was a sudden softening in the abrupt, stern voice.

"Be warned. Cromwell is still well disposed towards you"; and, without heeding the scornful curl of her lip, he continued, "but you are more than suspected of harbouring his enemies."

"I care not what the regicide thinks or suspects ;
all that I ask is to be relieved of your presence."

He smiled grimly, but took no further notice of her speech. The victory lay in his hands, and he

knew it. He dropped out his words slowly and deliberately.

"Do not arouse further suspicion by any rash action. If Harden has escaped by your aid, well, no one knows it but you. If—he—is here——" He stopped, and his eyes fell on the table where the gloves had been with so meaning a look in them that Dorothy's heart sank within her.

"If he is here——" he began again slowly ; but with an effort the girl mustered courage to reply.

"You will take him. He will be killed, and Hardenholt will be for ever yours. They will kill me, too, and you will get Doombe Royal as well."

Her voice had risen to a shrill pitch in her excitement, for her overstrung nerves were giving way, and even as she spoke she made a nervous movement of her hands, stepping back as she did so, and there, at the hem of her dress, on the polished oak of the floor, lay one of the gloves that had slipped and fallen from her hand.

Both saw it at the same moment, but ere Dorothy could make a movement, Maunsell had picked it up. He held it before her, and his voice again became stern and hard. "This is too large

to fit your little hand, Madam. This scented thing is proof enough. You see this crest? Harden is here." He paused for a moment, and then, with a contemptuous turn of his wrist, flung the glove on the table as he continued :

"You see, I know all. I knew it half an hour ago."

She made no answer. She had none to make with that terrible evidence lying there. Maunsell to the dust this proud man, with words that cut dark eyes seemed to read into her very soul. There was a light in them that withered her courage to nothing, and made her shrink and shiver at its fearful import. What mercy could she expect from him? She had used her woman's tongue to humble to the dust this proud man, with words that cut sharper than a knife, and now victory was his, and there was no hope of pity. It was not for herself she feared, but for Harden ; and at the thought of the terror to come all heart failed her, and she stood numbed and frozen into silence.

As for Maunsell, he had won, and he knew it. He had but to put forth his hand, and his enemy was in his power hopelessly and for ever. It was

but the world's way, as the world was then, if he exacted his due of vengeance from the man who had wronged him times without number, and who had won that which he would have given all the world to win. But how poor a recompense was revenge for what he had lost! And so, as he stood towering above the shrinking figure of the girl before him, there were a hundred conflicting emotions in his heart, for all the stern look in his eyes.

"Am I not right?" he asked at last, slowly and deliberately, and his voice seemed to break the spell which hung over Dorothy. A sob broke from her, and twice she tried to speak, but twice her voice failed her. At last she burst out. She was hardly conscious of what she said. All that she knew was that she was pleading for the life of the man she loved.

"If you are a man, if you have one spark of honour left in you, you will not betray him."

He laughed harshly. "Honour or manhood has nothing to do with this, Madam. I gave you your chance, but you have chosen your own course, and now——"

He turned as if to go, but her hand was on his

arm. Its light touch sent a shiver through him, and every note of that pleading voice cut him to the heart.

"Forgive me! Forgive what I have said! I am nearly mad. You say you love me; save him then—for my sake."

He had stepped back from her as she spoke, and now stood watching her with a strange light in his eyes, and a devilish whisper in his ears. He might buy her at the price of her lover's safety. But even as the thought came to him he flung it from him, and his dark forehead flushed with the shame of it. And then Antony Maunsell was himself again. But ere he could speak the girl had broken out into pitiful pleading once again. "Oh!" she concluded, "you cannot be utterly merciless! See! I offer my life for his. I swear to you that the moment he is free I will deliver myself up to Cromwell, and deny not the worst that can be brought against me. I am a woman, but my race knows how to die."

She stopped. Through the mist of her tears her eyes had caught his look, and with both hands clutching at his arm she waited in a gasping silence.

And then Maunsell's low, deep voice came to her with words of unutterable comfort.

"Yes, I think I can save Harden, and I will try. Nay; no thanks! You owe me none, nor do I ask for any; but listen! I have a safe-conduct with me, under Cromwell's own hand. 'Twas given to me for purposes of his own, and it will take Harden out of England until what you call 'better times' return." She made a movement as if about to speak, but he restrained her.

"Until I bring you this keep Harden safe. Let none know where he is bestowed except yourself." And then, with a smile, he took up the glove which had told so much, and handed it to her, saying, "And take this tell-tale thing away." She tried to thank him through her tears, but with a quick return to his stiff, formal manner he said, "You owe me nothing. What I have said I will do, and Harden's safety now remains with himself and you."

He stepped towards the door, but she stayed him, calling him back, and holding out an outstretched hand.

"Will you not take it?" she said. "It is now

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the hand of a friend." The iron bands of his self-restraint almost burst asunder, but he held himself in somehow. For one brief moment the small, white hand rested in his sunburnt palm, as he bowed low over it, and then he left in a profound silence.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LORD PROTECTOR.

THE great hall of Coombe Royal had been the scene of many strange things, for it had played its part in the history of the past, and now, once again after long years, ablaze with light, it was to be the theatre of events more strange, perhaps, than any that its old walls had ever looked down upon.

It was a room of immense size, the walls wainscoted in old oak and covered with older arms, banners, and trophies of the chase, with here and there a stiff portrait in a heavily carved and gilt frame. A peculiarity that made it unique was that the ceiling was domed, and high around the room there ran a massive gallery, beyond which could be seen passages and doors leading to the various wings of the vast rambling house, half fortress, half mansion. At the end farthest from the entrance was a large archway, draped with curtains of a rare tapestry, through which a glimpse was obtainable of a wide

stairway leading to the gallery above. The hall was furnished with the heavy solidity of the past. Near the fireplace was a large curiously carved easy-chair, close to which stood a terrestrial globe, and behind this there hung from the wall what appeared to be a full-length portrait; but beyond the outline of a broad frame nothing was visible, for the picture, or whatever it was, was draped with a thick, black curtain, across which stretched a golden cord, terminating in a large tassel of the same material.

This strange and gloomy patch of black, standing out in relief in the brilliant light, was sufficient to arouse the curiosity of the most stolid and indifferent, and in that crowded room, perhaps, some profane hand might have attempted to lift the veil and penetrate the secret, had it not been that all eyes and all attention were at the time centred upon the figure of a man who stood near the upper end of the room, close to the globe.

The broad brim of the high-plumed hat he wore—for he kept himself covered—threw his face somewhat in the shadow, so that it was impossible to clearly distinguish the features; but from the

shadow flashed the light of eyes that seemed to penetrate to every quarter of the room with a glance as keen as a Damascus poniard. Slightly above the medium height, with broad, square shoulders, this person held himself with a singular dignity, and there was an air of command and authority in his every look and gesture. He was plainly but richly clad, and the dust still clung to his long, spurred riding boots, for he had ridden fast and far that day. But even though every movement of that square-built, powerful frame seemed to show its strength, the keen observer would have noticed how, now and again, a spasm of pain seemed to traverse the broad chest, and how the gloved hand sought, as it were, support in the steel hilt of the long sword he wore close to his side.

Yes, Death was already knocking at Cromwell's door, and he knew it; but none else beside.

Close to the Lord Protector stood a silent, keen-faced soldier, and there was no mistaking dark Ireton, who, nearly connected with his chief by marriage, was ever at his side, lending the aid of his subtle brain to Cromwell's vast scheme. Near Ireton was a small group of men with long, serious

faces, who were dressed in sad-coloured garments, and were for ever murmuring amongst themselves. They were certain members of that Parliament upon which the iron hand of their master had closed, and who concealed their hatred of the dictator by the most servile obsequence, whilst they watched and waited for the first opportunity to accomplish his overthrow. At the time being they formed part of a deputation that waited upon Cromwell to prevail upon him to accept as a banner a red lion couchant on a white field, with the motto, "Who shall rouse him up?"

Brightly the lights shone on the steel caps, the breastplates, and drawn swords of the Ironsides who lined the room. Rock, tall and grim, stood behind His Highness, Mauley was at the door, and amidst those who thronged the hall were Patience Burnside and her father. At the moment this scene opened Maunsell had entered the room and spoken a few words in a low tone to Cromwell, and then a harsh, untunable voice, that sent a thrill through all who heard its metallic notes, broke the silence:

"It is well for her that she submits; but no news of Harden, Colonel?"

Maunsell hesitated for a moment, and then answered quietly :

" News in plenty, my lord ; but he is not yet taken."

" He lieth concealed within the house ! "

All eyes were turned on the speaker. It was Rock, and as the words fell from his lips a swift glance passed between him and Maunsell—defiance on the one hand, anger and surprise on the other. The shadow of his hat prevented Cromwell from noting this, or, if he did, he gave no sign. But there were two who marked the look exchanged between Maunsell and the Cornet, and drew their own conclusions therefrom. One of these was the wary and watchful Ireton, and the other Patience Burnside.

The dark, suspicious mind of Ireton was placed on guard on the moment, though he could read no further ; but Patience Burnside knew. She recalled in a flash how Maunsell had returned her the kerchief, and, with that subtle intuition which women alone possess, she was certain that a new and powerful support had come to aid the man she loved, and she pressed forward eagerly, as close as possible

to the group in order to hear each further word that followed.

Cromwell had turned sharply round, and was eyeing the Cornet. "Who is this fellow?" he asked.

"Ebenezer Rock, your Highness," was the answer, stoutly given by the old soldier himself, "some time trooper, and now Cornet in the Ironsides."

"Ah! I remember thee, and how thine eye was lost at Dunbar. How knowest this?"

The Cornet had a real opportunity; but unkind fate was against him. The thought that the great Captain recalled his loss on Dunbar Field made him glow with pride and zeal; but at that moment he caught sight of the comely face of the housekeeper, who smiled down upon him from the gallery, where she stood amidst a group of retainers, and the terror through which he had passed seemed to rise up once more, and chill his faculties. He grew fiery red, and after an effort almost shouted out:

"I know, General. There is no other refuge—had not the Babylonish woman stayed me," and he pointed excitedly to Mistress Battersby—"she, she stayed me with the devices of Delilah," he went on; and as Cromwell followed Rock's forefinger

with his glance, and saw the good dame shrink back hastily, something like the faintest flicker of a smile unbent his iron lips. Ireton had half turned away to conceal his open mirth, and even Maunsell, on the cross with anxiety though he was, could scarce forbear from laughter.

He, however, saw his chance, and, before Cromwell could make any further inquiry, put in :

" Cornet Rock is a brave soldier, as your Highness knows ; but he is apt to be headstrong. The house has been searched twice, and is guarded on all sides."

" It was not for Cornet Rock to speak as he did. His age and service should have brought discretion. I like not reckless chatterers in my service. As for the other matter, it is in thy hands, Colonel—I look to you to answer for it. What is it, Ireton?"

Rock stepped back, glaring with anger, and Ireton was about to speak ; but at that moment the curtains were drawn back, and Dorothy came forward slowly. She had tried to school herself to be humble and submissive ; but all her fierce pride of race arose within her as she saw herself before the

conqueror, helpiess in his hands. Maunsell stepped to her side as she entered, and led her up to Cromwell, and as he did so Ireton's keen eyes watched them narrowly.

"She is fair!" he muttered under his breath, "and Maunsell, I know, hath a soft heart beneath his steel corselet," and he smiled to himself.

And then, as Maunsell presented his charge, Cromwell uncovered, and Dorothy saw before her the face of the man who ruled all England with a power greater than any had ever held before. That rugged, gnarled face was turned towards her, with something of sternness in its aspect, but something yet of kindly admiration in the watchful eyes, and the great General bowed to her with the courtly grace that had come to him with his high estate, as Dorothy said with an effort, for there was something about the very presence of this man that seemed to overwhelm her:

"Sir! 'tis a poor welcome that Coombe Royal can give you."

"I am glad, madam, 'tis not so warm a one as it gave my Lord Fairfax. What say you, Ireton?"

"'Twas a brave fight ; but the face of the Lord was averted from us that day."

The allusion was an unhappy one, for it was on his own doorstep that the old Lord Capel fell, and Dorothy's eyes filled with tears, and her heart grew wroth within her, and what followed was to make her anger hotter, and send to the winds all resolves of meek submission. For, on Ireton's remark, one of the snuff-coated Parliament gentlemen, eager for speech, droned out :

"But it shone again with the fulness of the sun when your Highness came ! "

"Behold !" said another, "did not the strong towers of stone, the gates of brass, fall before the voice of your Highness, even as the walls of Jericho fell before the trumpet of the son of Nun ! "

"Peace !" said Cromwell harshly. "Peace, Master Pounceby, and thou too, Master Gristock ! Or, if thou speakest, bestow thy praises rightly. Let them not fall on me, a dry bone, an unprofitable servant ! Render praise not to the sickle, but to the hand that guides it ! " And then, with a sudden change of manner and a modulation of his strange, metallic voice, he turned to Dorothy, saying : " Thou

wert but a little maid, madam, when these things befell."

And back came the spirited answer:

"But old enough to remember, sir! and to wish that the same welcome could be given to General Cromwell now as when my father lived!"

High and clear her voice rang out, and then there came a moment of breathless silence, broken by an exclamation from Master Gristock:

"A most dangerous Malignant!"

Maunsell had stepped up to Ireton, and whispered something, and the answer came in as low a tone: "Ill, dost say! May such megrims ever seize the daughters of England!"

The crowd had ringed them in now, and all watched with eager faces for what would follow. The tears had gone from Dorothy's eyes, and it was with a clear, unflinching gaze that she met Cromwell's look—a dark, inscrutable glance, from which nothing could be read. At last he said slowly, "Thou hast thy father's spirit. He was a brave man! God rest his soul!"

And now the harsh, strident voice of Mauley came from the door:

"Yea, but we smote them hip and thigh! Smote we here the Achan that troubled Israel so that he fled for evermore!" There was a hustling at the door, and Cromwell, a grim smile on his face, made an excuse for the zealot.

"I crave thy pardon for the man's speech, madam! Such men as he are rough and rude; but they are as anvils that have worn out many hammers," and his keen eye flitted to Pounceby and Gristock a quick, imperceptible glance. Maunsell had whispered a warning word, but Dorothy heeded it not; for her spirit was fully aroused, and, fearless of consequences, she gave back the answer:

"Sir, excuse not your soldier's speech. A few words will not harm a prisoner, and I am a woman, and you wage war as safely here as at Basing House!"

A shiver went round the listeners at the words; but, all unknown to herself, Dorothy had taken the safest course, and her courage and spirit had gone to the heart of a man himself the bravest amongst the brave. A lesser spirit than Cromwell's might have been roused to anger by the petulant speech

of the girl; but with him it was different, although his tone was grave and quiet as he answered:

"Madam, I wage no war with women!" And then, with a sudden stern dignity that for the moment utterly overawed the girl, he continued: "But to me, its humblest servant, the Parliament hath entrusted the peace and order of this land—and there shall be peace! Lady Dorothy Capel! thou hast been ill-advised. Thou hast aided and abetted the followers of Charles Stuart. It is known that thou hast given shelter to that most dangerous rebel, Christopher Harden, whose life is capitally forfeit to the State!"

"He hath troubled Israel sorely!" put in Master Gristock; and Cromwell turned sharply on the man, but, ere he could speak, Maunsell had stepped forward on Dorothy's behalf.

"My lord, I will in future answer for this lady——"

"But I—I answer for myself! Sir, I do aver that I aided Sir Christopher Harden, and I will aid him further yet! Nay, I fear not your frown! Ask your own daughters if they would not do the like for their promised husbands!"

And a face, white with unutterable agony, drew back behind Burnside as Patience heard the words. "It is true, then; and he lied—oh, traitor heart!" she gasped; and a good woman had become a devil.

Maunsell had turned with a quick gesture of despair as the girl's voice rang out, to meet Ireton's searching glance, and then they both turned to where Cromwell stood. But he seemed to be standing as if in a dream, and his hand clutched tightly at his sword-hilt. Yet it was Dorothy alone who saw there was no anger in his eyes, but only an unspeakable suffering, and that perhaps he had scarcely heard her speech.

Through the intense silence there came to all the rapid drumming of approaching hoofs, a sound that grew nearer and nearer each moment; once there rang through the night the challenge of a sentry, and there was a moment's slacking of pace, and then the rider, whoever he was, rode onwards on his breakneck course. Something of attention was distracted from Cromwell, and eyes and faces began to turn to the open door of the hall, and a murmur of whispers arose. At this moment,

Cromwell, who had stood for a space facing Dorothy, but with eyes which she alone saw were not for her but looked far beyond, as it were into space, turned suddenly to Maunsell, and, covering himself, said in quick, rasping tones: "Colonel Maunsell, you have my orders concerning this lady. See that they are carried out!"

Maunsell bowed, and as he did so there was a thunder of hoofs at the hall door, someone sprang from the horse, and, dust begrimed and with blood-covered spurs, hurried in. A word from him and the sentries at the door gave way; another hurried word, and he had crossed the room. There were many there who knew him, and Pounceby and Gristock shrank aside on his coming, for they and their house loved not Colonel Pride. The crowd, however, impeded them, and the fierce soldier was by their side almost ere they knew it. He pushed past them with a contemptuous gesture, and stepping up to Cromwell, said out aloud, in a voice half-choked with dust:

"Victory, your Highness! The Dutch are utterly broken! Van Tromp is killed, and all that remains of the Holland fleet lies skulking in the

Texel. 'Twas a bloody battle and a glorious victory."

"Hurrah!"

It was Ireton's cheer, and as the ringing shout went out it was taken up again and again, and bright swords flashed in the bright light, and the grim Ironsides pressed forward to surround their great chief.

The fever of the thing took all present, and Dorothy's voice was added to those who cheered the gallant deeds of her countrymen.

Alone in the throng Cromwell stood silent, leaning on his sword. Suddenly he stretched out his arm to Pride, and the veteran soldier's hand met that of his chief in a warm clasp. Then, when the cheering was over, and the high excitement had for the moment subsided, this strange man, who covered his aims and dreams with the language of the Prophets, lifted his hand, saying solemnly:

"The kings of the earth girt their loins and came forth to destroy Israel! But the Lord hath stretched forth His hand, and lo! they are consumed in the fire therefrom!" And then, lifting his hat

from his head, he added, "To Him be thanks and praise!"

Down swept the flashing, upraised swords, and reverend heads were bowed in silence, broken at last by a single voice with a deep "Amen!"

And now the Lord Protector looked highly around him. "So perish all the enemies of England!" he said, covering himself once more, and, turning to Ireton, they exchanged a few words in a low tone together, after which he called to Maunsell, "Colonel, give me thine arm. There are things I would discuss with thee alone." Saying this, he linked his arm in Maunsell's, and the twain passed slowly out of the hall, followed by Ireton and Pride, and none else beside.

CHAPTER X.

BETWEEN MAN AND MAN.

IN one of the state rooms of Coombe Royal a man sat busily writing at a large table, covered with a litter of papers. At his elbow was a lamp of quaint workmanship, supported on a stand made of a brazen asp, with two rubies set in the head for eyes.

The head of the serpent was bent slightly down, and its fiery glances were fixed upon the man, as if it were a living thing, watching the silent worker; whilst the light itself, soft and mellow, lit up the rugged features of the Lord Protector of England; but in so doing showed how thin and sunken the face was, and that the red flush on his cheek came not from the strength of health.

Near a window, which was thrown wide open—for the moonlit night was warm—three men stood, conversing in whispers, and ever and again glancing at the bowed head and broad, bent shoulders of their chief. They were Ireton, Maunsell, and the tireless Pride, who had but taken a moment to quench

his thirst, and now stood, still dust-begrimed and hot, in ceaseless attendance on his loved General.

At last their whispering converse ceased, and they stood listening silently to the angry rasp of the pen, as Cromwell's heavy hand drove it across the paper. So for about the space of a half-hour he wrote, then he carefully tied up three packets. These he sealed and addressed, and finally, throwing down his pen, turned sharply round.

"Maunsell!" he said, "thou hast post riders ready?"

"Yes, your Highness."

"Then let these three despatches be sent at once," and Cromwell was about to hand Maunsell the papers, when he checked himself with an afterthought. "No!" he continued, "Ireton will see to this; and, Pride! go thou and rest—thou needst it sorely; Maunsell and I have certain matters to discuss." The two bowed and took their departure, Ireton with the despatches in his hand. As the door opened, Cromwell's quick eye caught the figure of a sentry in the passage without.

"Remove the sentry!" he said sharply. "It is safe here."

Ireton stopped and hesitated; but Cromwell repeated his order, and the tone of it was not to be denied. A quick look passed between Pride and Ireton. They said nothing, however, but obeyed, and a moment after the door closed their measured footsteps could be heard dying away in the distance.

For a few seconds Cromwell said nothing, but sat in a brooding silence; and then he turned to Maunsell. "Maunsell, I have had good news, news of the best, and ill news, news of the worst, to-day."

"But the good news was great," and Maunsell's firm glance sought Cromwell's face with a questioning look. He knew all this was but the preamble to what was uppermost in the Lord Protector's mind; but what this was it was impossible for him to guess.

"Ay! great indeed!" assented Cromwell. "And the wolves that snarl round England have been checked for long; but knowest thou that Willis is dead—slain in an idle brawl?"

"I knew it not," said Maunsell gravely, as he began to see the drift of the Protector's thoughts, and wondered how much he knew; "and yet," he

continued, "there was only one other ending fitter for a traitor and a spy——"

"And that?"

"A knotted rope."

The Protector smiled grimly. "I will bear that advice in mind, Maunsell," and then, with an apparent carelessness of tone, "Hast thou the passport for Monsieur Falaise?"

There was nothing in Cromwell's voice that showed he was making anything more than an ordinary inquiry; but light came to Maunsell with the question, and he guessed at once that in some strange manner his secret was discovered. It was not so, however. Maunsell was playing a robber with the greatest general of the age; and a slight hint from Ireton had been sufficient for that astute brain to play a deadly *coup*. Maunsell saw in a moment that he was forestalled and foiled. It had been his intention to give the precious paper to Dorothy that night, after the audience, and it lay now in his breast pocket. This would have been done, had not the opportunity been taken from him by this compulsory attendance on the Lord Protector, and so, careless and indifferent as Cromwell's

tone was, Maunsell felt the danger in the air, and nerved himself to meet it.

"Hast heard, Maunsell? Hast thou the passport?"

The strange harsh voice had a sterner ring in its tone, and Antony Maunsell answered simply:

"I have it, your Highness!"

"Then give it to me. It is of no use longer."

The blow had fallen, and, without a word, yet with a sinking heart, Maunsell handed the paper to Cromwell, who, taking it from him, ran his keen glance over it, and then tore it slowly into a hundred fragments.

"And now, Colonel Maunsell," he said when he had done this, and there was an ominous threat in his voice, "this is well done, is it not, and makes assurance surer?"

They were two strong men, now face to face. Cromwell's lips were set like iron, and the wonderful eyes blazed into Maunsell's glance as though they would consume him with their fire, but he was met by a look as grimly determined as his own.

"I play not with riddles, my lord. Make thy meaning plainer."

Cromwell laughed shortly. "What didst thou say was the fittest end for a traitor?"

Swift as rapiers their glances crossed at the speech, and Maunsell's hand for one brief moment sought his sword-hilt, and then fell to his side. With a mighty effort he controlled himself, and forced himself to answer calmly.

"My lord, your meaning has been made plain, but I will make your doubts as clear as day. Harden is my kinsman. He was once my friend. Yet if but a few hours ago he had fallen into my hands he would have been your prisoner. But now I am myself again, thank God! And I have done with this. There are others who can better carry out your orders than Antony Maunsell."

Cromwell had half risen from his chair as Maunsell spoke, and he exclaimed now in a voice half choked with anger:

"You! You dare deny me?"

"Dare is not the word to use to me. No sword has been so keen, no heart more steadfast in thy cause as mine. But here, in this thing, I stop. There are tasks which one man may not set another. There are things which a man may not do,

"And for me this is one of them; and as between thee and man, Oliver Cromwell, thou knowest I am not."

With a quick, impatient gesture Cromwell stepped to his feet and paced the room with hurried strides. Then as suddenly he stopped close to Maunsell, and asked:

"Lies there no other cause within thy heart?"

Maunsell knew and felt that those swift, far-searching eyes read deep into his soul, but he had passed through his tortures, and his hopes were dead, and that one secret of his heart would die with him.

"My lord," he said, "I have answered."

So for a moment they stood facing each other, and then Cromwell spoke in slow, measured tones.

"Colonel Maunsell, I will not press thee in this. It is well for thee that I bear in mind thy services in the past, but from this moment Pride will take thy place here. I want no lukewarm hearts about me. Thou art free to leave Coombe Royal the day I leave, but not till then, and I want thy word not to quit this house until I give thee orders. Have I this?"

Maunsell bowed—he dared not trust himself to speak—and left the room; but even as he left he realised that at one stroke as fair a career as man ever carved out for himself was shivered to nothing, and yet he was happier at heart.

When the door closed behind him Cromwell stood pondering for a little space, and then, walking to the open window, placed his hands on the mullions, and looked out into the night. His eyes rested on the dim landscape, but his thoughts were not with its silver, shimmering beauty. All was silent and still, though now and again the sharp call of a sentry came to his ears, and once there was the beat of galloping hoofs as a post rode through the night from Coombe Royal.

“Blue eyes and golden hair, and a fair face,” his thoughts ran on. “Ay! they win against all, and but that I want Harden—he is too sharp a thorn in my side—I would let things pass. But Maunsell! Old friend and comrade! What wind hath moved him to this course? Ireton must be right. Fool, to think his grizzled hair could avail him. And I must use the iron hand once more, I fear,” and he stretched out his hand and laughed

grimly. "'Twill be ill for Maunsell, and ill for Harden, and ill for that pretty maid, I fear."

With this he turned from the window and paced the room once more, and then the fevered brain thought of rest. He passed into an inner room, but came out again almost immediately, for the demon of sleeplessness had clutched him, and for him there could be no rest.

On a small table a decanter of wine and flask of water had been placed. He poured himself out some wine, diluted it with the water, and drank it slowly. Then he turned to his work-table once more, and the ruby-eyed asp, on which the lamp rested, bent over his bowed head.

For a time he pored over the map, but for once the great brain seemed worn and tired; then, pushing it aside, his eye caught an unopened envelope. This he tore open hastily, and as he read his face flushed with hot anger, and his strong hand crushed the paper which it held. It was nothing less than a letter of advice from Pounceby and Gristock to disband the army, and to restore to the Parliament the complete control of affairs, with a malignant suggestion in its humble wording that the time had

come even for his Highness to take the repose and rest which his unparalleled exertions for his country demanded.

All thoughts of Harden and Maunsell were carried away on the instant in the gust of wrath that swept over the Lord Protector, and ill would it have fared with Master Pounceby and Master Gristock had they stood in his presence then.

But through the impertinence of the demand Cromwell's far-reaching eye saw that a slow reaction was setting in, and that men's hearts wanted a change, although their lips did not express it, except in secret whispers, for fear of that iron hand that could strike so surely, and almost as in a vision he saw the day when those whom he had conquered would win all back again.

"Not whilst I live!" he gasped, and as he uttered the words there came to him again the warning, and for a moment the broad chest heaved in its agony. But he conquered the pain with an effort, and rose from his seat. He dared not yield, but it taxed all the strength of his iron frame and mighty will to win.

"I grow too much of a clerk," he muttered to

himself, as he glanced at the table with its litter of papers; "I will go out and do the rounds myself; it may bring some sleep afterwards."

With this he took his plumed hat, and, opening the door noiselessly, stepped out into the corridor, and as he did so two dark figures came out of the shadow into the dim light of a lamp that burned outside the door.

They were Ireton and Pride, and Cromwell knew why they were there, yet he asked:

"You here, friends?"

"Your Highness removed the sentry," said Ireton simply, but Colonel Pride said nothing, only his face looked up at Cromwell, with something of the wistful affection shown in the eyes of a faithful watchdog.

"I thank thee!" said Cromwell. "Come, we will do the rounds."

"Is there any need, my lord? Why not rest, and leave it to Pride or myself?"

"Rest! It is for rest I do this. There is a strange fever upon me, and perhaps the night air will bring me sleep. I want sleep."

There was a weariness of tone in the voice

that went to those faithful hearts, and Ireton would have urged his point again, but Pride stayed him with a gesture, saying, in a tone of affected cheerfulness :

"Come, my lord! 'twill be old times back again—come!" With this he led the way, and Cromwell followed, with Ireton by his side.

As they walked onwards through the long corridor, Ireton whispered, "Hast put Maunsell to the test, my lord?"

"Ay!" replied Cromwell, "and he hath failed."

Ireton said no more, and they went on in silence, descending a spiral stairway that ended in a small octagonal room, from which a huge door of carved oak led into the great hall. At the moment, however, the door was closed.

As they reached the room, Ireton asked in a low voice, "Shall I arrest him?"

"No! That may come later, and it may ruin all if done now. I want two birds, Ireton—the raven and the popinjay! See here, Pride! From this moment you take Maunsell's place here, and keep him under watch; but no arrest, unless he attempts to quit the house."

Cromwell spoke in a half-whisper, and Pride answered as lowly :

"I understand, your Highness. I would say, however, that there is some doubt if Harden is within the house."

Ireton shook his head, but Pride continued :
"Ere I joined Ireton on the watch at your door, I did the rounds myself, and a search-party coming in brought with them a man of ours, dead."

"Who?" asked Cromwell.

"Tutbury—Sergeant Tutbury—a brave man and a good soldier. There had been a hard fight, and Tutbury fell with a rapier thrust in his heart, and 'twas Harden's hand on that rapier-hilt, and, if so, he is gone."

Something like an oath hissed between Ireton's teeth ; but Cromwell, after a moment's thought, asked :

"Was there light enough for them to see—had they a lantern?"

"No! No light but the moon, though that is almost as clear as day."

"But day will make it a certainty. Ireton and Pride, make it your duty to visit the spot with the

dawn, and watch which way the footsteps lead. By Heaven! if Harden hath gone, Maunsell shall not escape a traitor's fate! But come, I want the air."

Their converse had been in low tones, which echoed softly up the spiral way above them; but the sound could not penetrate the massive door of oak, and as Cromwell spoke he placed his hand against it, and it swung open noiselessly, showing the great hall still partly in light, and showing, too, a group of startled men in sad-coloured garments, who, huddled together in the centre of the room, near the terrestrial globe, were staring with dismayed faces at the grim apparition in the door.

CHAPTER XI.

THE IMAGE OF THE KING.

FOR one brief moment Cromwell stood in the doorway, his fiery glance burning on the shuffling and uneasy group before him, and as they looked they caught with added terror the glitter of steel behind that stern figure, and saw, half in shadow and half in light, the menacing features of Ireton and Pride.

Then Cromwell came forward with quick, hasty steps, and his harsh, abrupt voice rang out :

“ You hold a late meeting here, sirs ! ”

They turned their dismayed faces from one to another, as if for help or inspiration ; but no one spoke, though they huddled closer near the globe, and a half-scornful smile flitted across Cromwell's lips as he waited for his answer.

Master Pounceby nudged Master Gristock, but the latter, a roll of papers in his hand, fell to folding them hastily, and, muttering something under his breath, made way for himself to the back of the

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group, whence he peered at Cromwell over the shoulders of his fellows.

Pounceby found himself nearest the Lord Protector, and to him the next question was addressed.

"Well, Master Pounceby, in another place I have heard thee talk, and talk, and talk—hast naught to say now?" Pounceby saw the dangerous smile hovering over the Protector's lips, he felt the irony of the tone, and he was not wanting in courage. He turned like an angry rat.

"We were but discussing here, in all loyalty, certain matters of State, your Highness."

"I see! An informal council."

"We were hoping, in all humility, that a favourable answer would be given to our petition, which hath the support of our Honourable House."

Cringe as he would, Master Pounceby could not conceal the spiteful light in his glance, and his stand gave heart of grace to his companions, who murmured something that sounded like "Yea, yea!" and began to press forward, with a curiosity that was partly restrained by fear.

A little in advance of his fellows, Pounceby stood hat in hand, and as he glanced up slyly he saw that

his barb had struck ; but he saw, too, how the bright eyes of Cromwell seemed to sink far back in their sockets, and the blue line of a swollen vein rise high upon his forehead. Pounceby saw all this with fear ; but it was too late to draw back, and, gathering all his courage together, he continued in his sharp, high-pitched voice : " That petition, as your Highness is aware, humbly set forth that the time hath come to disband the armed force that eats into the vitals of the nation."

And here his words were cut short by a burst of derisive laughter that broke from Ireton and Pride—mocking, cruel laughter, that stung like a lash, and Pounceby stopped with a snarl on his lip.

But Cromwell, with a motion of his hand, commanded silence.

" Peace ! " he said, and his voice was thick with restrained anger, " I will give them their answer, once for all—these buzzers of vain words—these idle praters. And you," he continued, turning on Pounceby, " this is thy demand : Reduce my ships ! Disband mine army ! Thou hast heard it, Ireton, and thou too, Pride ! Shall we unlace the bucklers of this land ? "

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He stood for a moment, his clenched right hand half raised, and then the lightning of his glance fell once more upon the group of malcontents, who stood with shrinking hearts before the storm they had raised.

"And this is thy demand?" he repeated. "Dost know its meaning? See here!" With a step forwards he reached the globe, and spun it round with a nervous gesture of his hand, and, as he suddenly arrested it, he placed his finger upon a small spot marked on the sea, his face still dark with anger; but his words coming clearly and freely now.

"Seest thou this speck upon God's earth, which men call England? Mark well its size—how poor, how small! And here, and here, and here, the swords thou wouldst send to rust, the sails thou wouldst furl, have spread her might. And thou and thine would make her, who hath grown so big, a child again!"

He checked his speech, and searched them with his glance, and as they fell backwards from him, he continued:

"Hast naught to say? Where are the ready tongues, the scheming brains, that would destroy

their country? Why silent now? Sirs, I want no light of thine to guide me. Though I dwell in Meshech, which is prolonging, in Kedar, which signifieth darkness, yet the Lord God will not forsake me. Begone! Thou hast had thy answer—begone!”

They waited to hear no more, but fled like frightened sheep, Pounceby alone preserving some dignity of manner. He was the last to go; but as Pride closed the door behind him he seized Pounceby's wrist, and placed his cold hand for one brief moment on the steel hilt of his sword, whispering as he did so:

“In a week this clears thy nest.”

Then with a laugh he came back, and, standing near Ireton, made a slight gesture towards the door as he said:

“The corn doth ripen for the sickle.”

And the answer came with a low, grim tone:

“Ay! 'twill be a full harvest we garner.”

And then they turned to Cromwell as if awaiting his further commands, but he had moved slightly from them, close to the globe once more, and was spinning it round with an idle hand; yet beneath

the broad brim and scarlet, drooping plumes of his hat they saw from his knitted brows and the far-off look in his eyes that the Protector was lost in reverie. So they drew back from him, and, standing in the shadow of the great curtains that covered the archway, conversed together in low, earnest whispers, leaving their chief to his thoughts.

Now, though the room was in light, the gallery above was in deep gloom, so that neither the two whisperers by the archway, nor the brooding figure at the globe, saw a door in the corridor above open noiselessly, and a slight, dark-cloaked figure steal forth softly. They heard not the light footsteps, which arrested themselves at the sight in the hall, and then, like a thing of air, the figure slipped back into the shadow of a pillar, and glanced down with wondering, curious eyes upon those below.

It was Dorothy herself, and, as she leaned forward to get a better view, Cromwell suddenly turned towards Ireton and Pride, and called out:

"Come, sirs, the rounds! we but waste time here."

They came up to him, and as they approached Ireton said, "Think you it was a waste of time to

come here, your Highness? Remember what we have heard."

From on high the watcher saw Cromwell's features darken.

"Can I forget?" he answered; and then, in bitter iteration, "The Parliament would rid the nation of its strength, reduce our ships, disband our army, and gather to itself the spoils that we have won."

A short, mocking laugh broke from Pride, and he looked down on his shining sword-hilt, caressing it the while with his fingers, but Ireton said simply:

"Ay! they talk much."

"But here, as I stood near that thing"—and Cromwell pointed to the globe—"their words came back to me, and with them a new light. We must obey; they speak with the voice of the nation."

What hand could lift the impenetrable veil that shrouded the secrets of Cromwell's heart? Who can tell what schemes, what thoughts, were passing through his brain when he stood there dreaming by the globe? Be that as it may, his words fell upon his hearers like a sudden, stunning blow.

Pride looked up in blank astonishment, and

Ireton stepped a half-pace back, but rallied himself as he burst out :

"The voice of the nation! That babbling crowd!" And then he came close up to Cromwell, as he said in deep, thrilling tones: "My lord! My lord! The nation speaks with another voice. It cries out from the hot tops, but it is not heard. It calls for us——" He hesitated and faltered, and Pride put in :

"Its David

It had come at last. Was it for this that Cromwell played with them when he affected to yield to Pounceby's demand? No man may tell. But now that the offer was made he either could not or would not understand, though for once his glance was fixed theirs, and he spoke as a man speaks who communicates thoughts with words that may mean everything or nothing. He seemed to commune with himself aloud rather than to answer them directly. "There is a strange itch grown upon their spirit," he muttered; "they thwart our labours, dry our energies. They daily clog the wheels of government." And Ireton put in softly, "Why, then, endure their tyranny?"

And now Cromwell met their glance full and fair, but they read nothing behind those rugged, impassive features.

"I must be a slave to submit to their humours! And I have a remedy," he said in harsh, angry accents; and Ireton now played his great card.

"Take it, my lord! The time is ripe. Lift but your hand, and to-morrow sees you King of England. The people cry for a king. Let Israel have her desire."

With bated breath and straining eyes Dorothy listened to these words, and watched the scene. From the grey gloom above she saw Cromwell start back as if in astonishment; but she saw, too, the light of triumph that played forth from his eyes. The gallery was in darkness, and the three below were absorbed in the great game they played. She would hear more at whatever risk, and swiftly and silently she slipped forwards, and, gaining the staircase, descended it, until at last she stood where the heavy folds of the curtain partly covered the wainscoting, and thus securely hidden became a witness to all that was to follow.

Ireton had thrown his die, and now abided the

issue, a smile on his lips and confidence on his brow. Pride stood erect and upright, smiling, too, a grim, triumphant smile, for in his heart of hearts he believed that they had won.

But now that it was all as clear as broad noon, now that he had but to stretch forth his hand, Cromwell paused. That strange, subtle mind of his, as quick to resolve as it was to execute, for once hesitated, and he tried to set their offer aside.

"Nay, Ireton!" he said. "King! What want I with such a feather in my cap?"

Ireton stroked his dark moustache. He saw and understood this fencing; but the blunter Pride pressed forwards with hot, eager words.

"The people wish for it. They murmur mightily. There are many would feel the easier wert thou but named King. Obedience follows the very word!"

In his excitement Pride placed his hand upon Cromwell's sleeve, and Ireton, approaching closer, urged:

"Lift but your hand, my lord. The time has come!"

Ay! Had it? Once more the blue veins rose

on the Lord Protector's forehead, and his frame shook as with a tremendous inward struggle. Had the time come? Was the great step to be taken? Was Israel to have her desire, or was this but an alluring, blazing phantom that led to destruction, utter and complete?

He almost tore himself from Pride's grasp, and stepped back, his hands clenched, his face grim and set. In that one moment as he stood before them a storm of memories passed over his soul, and his piercing, far-reaching mind looked, with the glance of a prophet, into the future.

He had done things which no great or good man could do. He had achieved success where none but a great and good man could succeed. He had never flinched before. Nay, not even at the dreadful moment which ended in the death on the block before the Banquet Hall at Whitehall. But this—but this. Something in his heart of hearts told him it was impossible. Light came to that lonely, storm-tossed soul—light to see, and strength to resist. And the watcher behind the curtains saw the strong face turn from bronze to ashy grey, and the lips grow black with the violence of his emo-

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tion, and then she heard a voice, harsh and choking with restrained passion, as Cromwell burst forth :

"Ye two! Ye have done wrong to tempt me. King! God hath blasted the very name! Nay, no more; I will hear no more, I say! On this let there be silence for ever."

He turned from them, leaving the twain with downcast faces, staring at each other, and stepped across the room, until at last he stood near the curtain, scarce an arm's length from the listener. Dorothy heard his quick, short breathing, she heard the muttered words, "King! King!" and then, as she leaned hard back, she saw his hand grasp the heavy folds, as if to draw them aside, and her heart became as ice. But as suddenly as he had stretched it forth Cromwell dropped his arm, and, turning, went slowly back.

"Pride," he said, and his voice still shook, though he was now outwardly calm, "I must rid myself of these chattering jays. The day we reach London, go thou and turn them from their seats. Close their doors! Tell them their sins have overtaken them!"

Pride's grey eyes gleamed like opals. "I'll fail

not in the task, my lord!" he said, "on the faith of a poor gentleman!" And then he drew back, muttering under his breath, "'Tis the first step—and then, perhaps!"

But Cromwell had yet more to say. He placed his hand on Ireton's shoulder, and the harsh voice was deep and grave with reproof.

"And thou, who art as a son to me; what devil sent thee to set this snare before me?"

For once Ireton failed to grasp the situation, and, like a desperate gambler, made yet another throw.

"Thou wilt not take thine own?" he urged. "Thou wilt not give the people their desire?"

Cromwell's hand fell from his shoulders.

"Again!" he said bitterly. And then, with a burst of passion, "Leave me, you two—leave me! I would be alone with my thoughts!"

With a shrug of his shoulders Ireton stepped back, and, taking Pride's arm, the two passed out through the archway, brushing by Dorothy as they went, and as they passed she heard Ireton's dark whisper:

"The seed is sown."

For a little space Cromwell stood, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes fixed on a far-off dream-land; then he turned, and wearily sank into a huge arm-chair, muttering something to himself that Dorothy could not hear.

As for her, it was impossible for her to move, and so seized was she by the fascination of the scene that, even were there an opportunity of slipping back and escaping, she was unable to have availed herself of it.

She had discovered a secret that none suspected before, and her brave Royalist heart was hot within her at the daring of those who would have taken the seat of God's anointed. And yet with this all, there was a strange pity for that great and lonely figure that sat there brooding before her.

After all he had refused! This would be news indeed for the exile at St. Germain's to hear! And Harden would bear it to his King from her. For a moment she thought she had seen enough; but perhaps more would come, and she would wait.

One by one the minutes passed, one by one the tall candles burnt out, sputtering in their sockets, until, at last, save where two large lamps burned

at the end of the room, throwing that strange black square with the golden cord across it in full relief, and surrounding the figure of the Lord Protector with light, all else was in a deep gloom.

Cromwell made no movement. His head had sunk forward on his breast, and so still and silent was he that Dorothy fancied he slept. In her eager curiosity she was about to step forth and scan more carefully the features of this man who had done such great things, and who had crowned them all by putting aside a temptation the like of which, as Dorothy thought, had never fallen to man before.

To her he had always been a grim phantom of terror. She had been taught to hate and scorn him, but she could scorn no longer, and even the very hatred was softened by an instinctive admiration that she could not control. In the glare of the audience room that very night she had seen him hold himself as a king, as one whom God's own hand had crowned, and now the Titan was alone and unmasked, fighting with himself a tremendous conflict. She would see this to the end.

She made a half-step forwards from her place of concealment, and then as swiftly moved back,

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the shuddering folds of the curtain just covering her in time as Cromwell lifted his head and glanced highly around.

"King!" he said aloud, and the vast, silent room echoed back the word as it came forth in ringing accents. "King! They would have me king!" And now there was a bitter scorn in his tone. "An empty name! For am I not this day numbered amongst the kings of the earth? I who have to-day refused a crown. Yet have I all but that shadow—the name of king." He rose from the chair, and paced the room. He seemed to Dorothy to bulk huge and vast in the shadow, and then, as he came back into the circle of light, he halted once more before the globe, and his face was from Dorothy, though she heard every word of that strange self-communion in which he spoke out his heart aloud.

"A crown! I—the poor gentleman of Huntingdon, on five-score pounds a year—then colonel of horse, general, leader of the army—and now Lord Protector of England! A crown for me!"

Once more he placed his sunburnt hand upon the globe, and made the stand rock as he shook it to and fro.

"This small patch of soil, this sea-bound island, that I under Providence have lifted so high amongst the nations, queen of the seas, arbiter of destinies, sued to by kings. Behold! their great ones are without, and suitors in the gate—French, Spaniard, and Venetian. My fleets sweep the seas; my armies shake the land; my enemies—God hath made them as stubble to this blade." He half drew the long sword at his side as he spoke, and then struck it home again in the scabbard with an angry snap, as he continued: "What need I of kingship"—and here his voice failed somewhat—"save a line of kings?"

And now there came to Dorothy a swift and sudden inspiration, such as might reach the brain of woman, but never that of man.

With a rapid movement she put aside the curtain, and, stepping boldly forwards, stood by the black veil on the wall, her hand holding the golden tassel attached to the cord that crossed it. Her dark cloak had fallen back, showing the graceful, white-robed figure beneath. A collar of brilliants clasped her throat, and from under the waves of her fair hair the blue eyes shone with a high resolve.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WATERS OF BITTERNESS.

PATIENCE BURNSIDE sat at her window, staring with hot, arid eyes into the still night.

When Harden's falseness was made manifest, and revealed, clear as broad day, by Dorothy, she was stunned and numbed by the blow, and had come back from Coombe Royal with her father as in a dream—a hideous dream in which everlasting night had fallen upon her soul.

All through the moonlit walk on their return, some fiend seemed to drone Dorothy's words into her ears, and it was with a maddened brain and a bursting heart that she reached their home.

She longed to be alone, to fight this terror in the solitude of her own room; but there was an ordeal to be endured yet, and that was the nightly prayer which Burnside offered to the Most High.

In the bitterness of her heart she could have laughed in open mockery at this, and all other prayers.

Of what avail was it? Had that Invisible and All-powerful Being, to whom they were about to kneel in abject submission, ever stretched forth a hand to save her?

No! He had let her drift, and had seen her swept away as flotsam on the tide! And she had prayed too! Prayed for a light that never came, for strength that was not given. No! She could not pray to One who had turned a deaf ear to agonised entreaty; and whose pitiless cruelty, if He existed, had cast her a hopeless wreck upon the rocks.

And so she would have fled to her room, but for the thought of her father; and nerving herself she prepared to endure what was to her but a pitiful sham; and through pale lips she repeated words that had now no meaning for her. At last it was over! Her father kissed her, and bade her good night, and she was alone.

As the door closed behind Burnside, she stood for a space, her hands to her temples, and a blind, unreasoning rage filled her heart against her own father.

"The dotard!" she exclaimed, "to believe all

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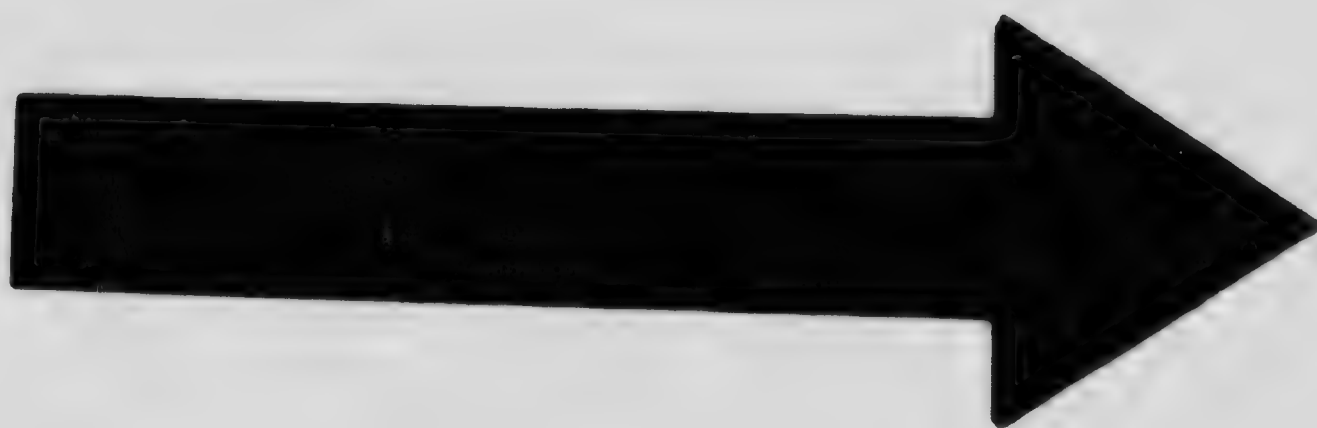
this! To make me go through all this! There is no God! There cannot be!"

And then with a gasp she turned, and sought her own room.

Once there, she loosened her hair from the prim bands in which it was held, and, throwing on a loose robe, seated herself at the open window, her pale face resting between hands as cold as death.

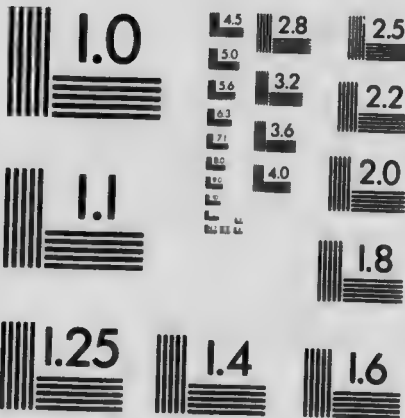
The moon shone kindly down upon those starry eyes. The night wind fanned her hot forehead, and played with the silken tresses of her hair; and from the hawthorn hedge that skirted the road below her window a nightingale burst into full-throated, glorious melody. But not for her was the beauty of the night, the glory of the song. The fires of hell were in her heart; and her burning eyes ran their hot glance through the shivering moonlight, to where a huge phantom castle, the vast shadowy mass of Coombe Royal, loomed—there were her thoughts, and there lay the traitor.

Indeed, Harden had done his work thoroughly. He had set about the moral ruin of this beautiful



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creature with the skill of a master-devil, and he had achieved complete success. He had begun by pitilessly weakening her belief in religion. He had placed her in a mist of uncertainty and doubt. He did this with caution and care. He never argued with her; but a chance remark here and there, a sneer dropped now and again at failings which were only too apparent, had sapped that clinging faith in religion without which no woman can be a good woman.

When this outwork was passed, the way was easier, and at last he gained his desire—and, well, the amusement was over, and he rode away; but he had left behind him a noble nature utterly blasted and ruined. It was not the first time he had pursued this course; but never had his success been so complete, never had the ruin that followed been so complete and hopeless. Ay, it would be a heavy count against him on the Day of Days, when the souls of mankind trooped to the trumpet that sounded the Last Roll Call.

There, sitting at the window, Patience saw it all now, and knew Harden to be what he was.

"The traitor!" she gasped, and shuddered as

the words formed themselves on her lips, and then despair, deep and hopeless, fell upon her. Her proud, imperious spirit writhed under the blow. And then came the thought, which comes ever to those who are weary and heavy laden, whose sorrows are greater than they can bear: Better death than this! Death would end it all, and the step into the unknown would bring peace. It needed but a firm heart for a second—there would be pain for a moment, and after that rest.

Slowly she arose, and walked to her dressing table. Two candles burned there by a mirror, and as her eyes caught the reflection of her own features she smiled bitterly.

"Ay! white as death! White as death! The death that will soon come," she muttered, and then with hasty hands she opened an inlaid casket lying on the table before her, and took therefrom a small stiletto. It had been Harden's own gift to her, and as she held the jewelled haft in her fingers, and glanced at the shining, deadly blade, she almost sobbed out, "He has killed my soul. What matters the rest?"

For a space, a little space that seemed ages, she

hesitated. The room darkened and reeled around her; the lights of the candles sank before her dim eyes to two small stars of fire; there was a drumming in her ears, and she tottered, and would have fallen but for the support of the table.

"What matters the rest?" It was as if some invisible presence had spoken the words. It mattered nothing. All that was life to her was gone. There remained nothing. And yet, on the brink of the unknown, she shuddered and shrank back. It was no spiritual fear; she had lost that. It was a bodily fear—poor, wounded thing!

At last her senses came back to her, and she partly recovered herself. Once more her courage arose full-hearted, and with a rapid movement of her hand she tore at her dress, and bared her white bosom. The next moment the dagger flashed high. All fear was gone. That lithe, strong arm could have driven the iron blade to the hilt in her heart without a tremor now. For one brief moment the glittering blade was held on high, in shivering, deadly menace, and then as swiftly as it was raised her arm dropped again. And once more it seemed as if that invisible being, who was ever with her

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now, was whispering urgent and insistent at her ear, pouring in new thoughts of evil more deep and hideous than before.

"No," she said aloud, "not yet. He must come, too. He is mine; I have paid for him with my soul."

And now, with a wicked, cruel laugh, she flung the dagger on the table. "Rest there," she said; "my hour has not yet come."

And, turning, she went back to her window and her thoughts. Hour after hour passed. The moon sank, a wan shield of silver, into a grey sea of cloud, and for a space all was opal gloom and darkness, save where the beacon of the morning star shone on the death of night.

But still she sat, brooding, scheming—her elbows resting on the window, her head clasped in her hands, and her fierce eyes never moving from the dark shadow of Coombe Royal. It seemed as if they penetrated the distance, passed through those massive walls, and saw, as clear as day, all that was behind them.

The tempest in her soul had died away, and she was calm now, and cold as ice. As the hours

went by she reasoned the whole thing out. Her death would only free Harden—and Harden was hers. She meant to die, to end her life with her own hands, if need be—but it would not be to leave Harden for another. She had bought him, and paid for him, and when her soul crossed the Narrow Straits the soul of Harden would be by her side, her very own—lost, like her own.

Disordered, maddened as the poor brain was, it was possessed by a strange intelligence. She pieced together the incidents of the past day; one by one she gathered clue after clue, with a memory that never failed, with a judgment that never faltered, until at last she could read all as though it were written on a scroll before her.

And so she sat until a red flush came into the east, and then, and then only, did she rise from her vigil. The white night was past, but there yet remained life—and vengeance.

Some little time after, staid and composed, as though the horrors of the night had been but a dream, Patience knelt with her father at the morning prayer. There was no struggle now; all that was over, and she went through the ordeal as a

mere matter of routine, with perhaps only a little weariness that it should be so long. When at last it was ended, and their simple meal was finished, Burnside said, with something of hesitation in his manner :

"I go to seek audience of the Lord Protector to-day."

Patience looked up at him, inquiry in her glance.

"Ay!" said Burnside. "I go to kneel before him, and to ask forgiveness for our benefactor, and the Lord will soften the Protector's heart, and let the good deeds of Harden weigh against that which is held against him."

Patience bowed her head as she answered :

"It is well, and like thee. But if thy prayer be not heard, and Sir Christopher hath not escaped, wouldst aid him further?"

She asked the question with a sudden, fierce earnestness, but kept her glance from him, for she feared to let her father see the light that burned in her eyes.

"Yea!" he answered, "with all my power, but what more can I do?"

"We can leave this place," she said, "and

journey to London. Sir Christopher could go with us. None would suspect to find him in our company, and once in London we have friends, and he has friends, and there is safety across the sea. Wilt do this?"

Once more there was the same quick inflection of the voice, and it was with almost a gasp of relief she heard her father's answer.

"Yea, and more beside if need be."

"Come then," she said. "The Lord Protector stirreth early. I will come, too, and seek Lady Capel, and offer our aid."

"God grant us success."

"Ay! if there be one," murmured Patience, but so low that her father failed to hear the bitter words.

And an hour later these two, with hearts in which thoughts as wide asunder as the poles were working, walked through the woodland towards Coombe Royal.

Once arrived there was some little delay, for, unlike his usual custom, Cromwell was not visible, but at last they heard that he took the air in the shrubbery, and then father and daughter separated,

the one to seek Cromwell, and the other to play the first card in her deadly game of vengeance.

On a narrow pathway, between two high hedges of holly, Cromwell was pacing slowly, lost in thought, his hands clasped behind his back, his head bent forwards. Something of that night of mental struggle still showed in him in the pallor of his features, and it seemed, too, that a new dread had come upon him, for he wore a steel corselet, and was fully armed, and at each end of the pathway stood a sentry, his carbine loaded, ready for any emergency. This new terror, the dread of assassination, was growing on Cromwell daily. At present it came and went, but soon there was to be with him, as with other tyrants, the ever-haunting phantom of murder, and each wavering shadow, each nook and cranny he passed, would hold, to his disordered and feverish mind, a murderer with death in his hand. Close to one end of the path was a rustic bench, and on this Ireton was seated, poring over some papers, whilst now and again his quick eye glanced at the solitary figure of his chief pacing monotonously up and down. It was here that Burnside found Cromwell, and it was here that at first he

could find no entrance; but finally Ireton caught sight of him, and, folding up his papers leisurely, arose and approached. Burnside explained his desire for an immediate interview with Cromwell, and Ireton, with a slight shrug of his shoulders, as if to say it was useless, bade Burnside follow him, and, on reaching the bench, they stood awaiting Cromwell's approach.

The Protector came up slowly, his eyes still fixed upon the ground, seeming neither to hear nor see anything. The scabbard of the long sword he wore clicked and rasped on the gravel, and Burnside saw the steel butt of a pistol glint in his belt as he came nigh. Then Ireton stepped up and explained that the pastor wished to see the Lord Protector on an important subject.

In his heart of hearts Cromwell loved not this zealous priesthood, whose aid he was, however, often compelled to seek, and at the moment the presence of one of their cloth was distasteful to him in the extreme. He looked up at Burnside, saying sharply:

"How now? What want you here, Master Burnside? I would be alone."

"And I, Elihu Burnside, preacher of the Word, say thou canst not be alone—thou whom the Lord hath set as a flaming sword over this land."

Ireton had stepped a little out of earshot and was watching the two, his scroll of papers in his hand. At Burnside's speech he saw Cromwell smile grimly as he made answer, trying to avoid the homily he feared was approaching. "Tush! we are alone, Master Burnside. A truce to thy vain imaginings. I have things to think of—go in peace!"

But Burnside would not take his dismissal. With an earnest entreaty in his voice he continued:

"I have a prayer to make thee—deny me not! I am old, and my footsteps totter towards the grave."

The simple earnestness of his voice carried weight with it, and, after a brief second of hesitation, Cromwell said resignedly:

"Speak, then."

"Your Highness! I have come to seek for a life. Sir Christopher Harden, malignant and rebel as he is, saved me and mine from Rupert's spoilers. I—God knows my life is of little value, but he saved

my daughter's honour, and thou hast daughters of thine own."

Ireton had approached at the speech, and stood close to Cromwell, as the latter replied to Burnside :

"Yes, it is true I have daughters of mine own, but I have yet another child, dearer to me than life, than honour, than aught thou canst promise, preacher—'tis England."

"Ay! and thou hast been a father to her, but 'tis only a life I ask for—one life in requital for what he hath done; and I, too, have served the State."

Their eyes met as the pastor spoke, deep and earnest entreaty in his glance, but Cromwell's face was passionless, and he said slowly and coldly :

"He is an open rebel; his life is forfeit to the law. He must die."

Burnside's pale cheek flushed with anger at the refusal and the callous, icy manner in which it was given.

"Wouldst entirely cut off Benjamin?" he exclaimed. "Art thou drunken with blood?"

For a moment the Lord Protector stared at him in angry astonishment, but, calming himself with an effort, "Preacher! you ask for the life of a man

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who is yet free. The bird is not yet caged"; and then, with a sudden inquiry in his glance, he asked, "Knowest thou where Harden lies concealed?"

He paused and waited for an answer, and then his dark, suspicious mind saw guilt in the silence that followed.

"Art thou, too, a traitor?" he went on, and, turning to Ireton, who had stepped up to him, he burst out: "By the Lord, Ireton! they compass us like bees: I will pluck their stings from them. Speak, man!" he continued, his sombre glance once more on Burnside, "Hast lost thy tongue? or shall I number thee amongst the priests of Baal—meet for death?"

But now Ireton played the peacemaker.

"Be still!" he said to Burnside, who would have spoken, and then to Cromwell: "Hear me, your Highness! There is some truth in Master Burnside's speech. Cut not Benjamin off entirely. We want the nobles of the land. We want their help and aid. How can they give it, when each one has lost, or fears to lose, a kinsman or a friend? Be merciful in this, my lord! This blood-letting hath bred many traitors."

Burnside looked his thanks at Ireton, as he entreated once more :

"Your Highness, thine own and chosen pleads with me—be merciful."

For some little time Cromwell said nothing, but stood glowering at the ground at his feet, the sunlight glittering on his corselet, and flashing in jewelled rays from the bright hilt of his sword. At last he spoke, and voice and face were stern and cold as ice :

"Yes ; I have heard thee both, and thou, Master Burnside, hast had thine answer. Meddle no more with this. Well for thee is it that thou art old and stricken in years, and hast laboured with zeal in the vineyards of the Lord—else out of thine own mouth would I have condemned thee——" Burnside made an effort to speak here, but Cromwell stayed him with a sharp command.

"No more ! Hence ! I will not hear thee more—thou art in danger of the law thyself !"

With this he turned his back upon the twain, and resumed his walk between the holly hedges.

CHAPTER XIII.

TAKEN BY ESCALADE.

IN the early dawn Colonel Pride, accompanied by the Cornet and a small party of men, amongst whom was Peter Mauley, sought the spot where the body of Tutbury had been found. The traces of the deadly struggle were still fresh upon the sward ; but on that soft, springy turf, wet with dew, there was no sign to show which way the victor had gone. A dull, red splash at his feet caught Mauley's eye. He stooped, and after a glance picked it up. It was a feather from the plume in Harden's hat, all damp and dew-bedraggled, and, as they crowded round it, Mauley said :

" 'Twas Harden's hand that slew my comrade —this makes it certain."

Rock smiled grimly, and Mauley, putting the feather carefully away, continued :

" The night and the dew have dulled its colour ; but I will dye it bright once more in his heart's

blood, and by my hand shall he fall—he who has slain my friend!”

But a crisp order from Pride stopped further talk, and they fell to searching again, until at last Rock, who had gone up the narrow pathway, uttered a loud exclamation. He had found a track, and following on it they found another, and yet another.

They pressed forward like bloodhounds, Rock with secret exultation in his heart, for he saw that the footsteps led in the direction of Coombe Royal; but now came a check, for, on turning the elbow of the forest, they found the ground hard and stony, and all traces were lost.

They groped together, and one said: “He hath turned aside here for sure, and escaped after all.”

“Nay!” said Rock, “he hath no means of escape. The coney hath run to his burrow; he lieth there—there, Colonel! Under our hands.”

And, turning to Pride, he pointed a lean hand to where, but a quarter-mile away, the walls of Coombe Royal rose.

“Yes!” gibed Pride, “and taken a knotted halter with him. Wouldst like to bear this news to the Lord Protector?” and he laughed.

The Cornet grew red under his sunburn. "Chattering fool, he called me," he burst out, "I, who have seen blood run like water for thirty years. I who when young rode with Bernard of Weimar through the duchies, and who, old and grey as I am, have carried a red sword from Chalgrove Field to Worcester—chattering fool!"

"Peace, old ban-dog!" And Pride placed his hand on the Cornet's arm. "Peace! thou mayest be right after all. I shall make my report to the Lord Protector at once. In the meantime, how go thy guards?" But the Cornet's heart was still sore within him, and he dared not trust himself to speak. All that he did was to point to Coombe Royal; and Pride, looking, saw the wet light of the morning flame on the cuirass of a sentry, and as he followed the sweep of Rock's arm he saw another, and yet another.

"Locks that are hard to pick, Cornet—safer than bolts and bars," he said, and then, dismissing the men, Pride took himself off, but Rock and Mauley remained behind. They harked back to the spot where Tutbury had fallen. There was a great brown blot on the sward, and beside it the

turf had been torn up by strong hands, that clutched and dug into it in their death agony.

For a little space they stood in silence, and then Rock said: "He was thy sworn comrade, Mauley; where wilt thou bestow him?"

"He shall sleep here," was the sombre answer; "here, to-day, will he lie in a soldier's grave; and his spirit will walk the spot, and make it accursed, for he was done to death foully! Nay, Cornet! I know it! For it is given to me to see, and the scales that are on other men's eyes have fallen from mine. 'Twas a felon's blow that slew Thomas Tutbury—I know it!"

And the grim fanatic shook his clenched fist before him, and there was vengeance and death in his eyes.

Rock pulled at his long moustache. That such things were true he knew. Did not the dying Pappenheim see the dead king at Lützen? Had he not been forewarned himself once—nay, twice?

"It may be," he said, and then, "See that all is arranged. I will myself attend with the Colonel."

So saying he left Mauley, and took his way towards Coombe Royal. One by one he examined

the sentries at their posts, and at last found himself on the east side, near a high ivy-grown wall, a wall so high that a man could not reach its top with the point of a lance. It ran almost in the form of a square, enclosing a wing of the house, from one end of which Kenelm's Tower, which lay within the enclosure, rose high into the morning, the sunlight shining clear upon its scarred and mottled surface.

Rock let his eye rest upon the tower. His keen glance examined each crack and fissure in the wall, and strove to penetrate the inky depths behind the dark loopholes. But he saw nothing except the green moss that covered the stones, the tufted grass that sprang from the crevices, and the slow-waving arms of the pink valerian, which, now in full bloom, sprouted from the crannies around the loopholes, and fringed the base of the battlements.

Rock's glance travelled to the crenellated defence that surmounted the tower, and he watched a flight of pigeons as they circled around it twice, and then settled on the edge of the parapet, with a fluttering of soft wings and melodious cooings.

"They say that from the battlements five

counties may be seen," said Rock to himself, "and that beneath it lie secret prisons, known to none."

And then his one eye seemed to grow smaller as he muttered: "If he is anywhere he is there. I shall double the guards around this wall."

With this he went forward, and, on turning the angle of the wall, found himself near an arched gateway, flanked on either side by a small tower, all ivy-grown, as was the rest of the wall.

The massive iron-studded and spiked doors of the gate were closed, and a quick challenge, and a flash of light and colour in the shadow of the ivy, showed where the sentry stood. Rock, who had given the countersign, marched up to him:

"Hast aught to report?"

"Nothing, Cornet, save that in the small hours of the morning someone paced the garden behind the wall for an hour or more."

"Hm! Didst see who it was?"

"I looked through the Judas hole, but could see nothing."

"Hm! Let me see!"

The sentry slid back the cover of the peep-hole, and Rock peered through. What he saw was an

old rose-garden, in glorious bloom. A little to the left was a summer-house, all white with the blossoms of a climbing rose, that covered it like a snow-drift, and behind this ran a high rose-hedge, cut and trimmed in the form of a wall with battlements, and higher than a tall man, so that beyond this Rock could see nothing.

Between the summer-house and the gravelled path, which led from the gate straight to the tower, from which access was gained by a low, lancet-shaped doorway, there was a square of soft turf, green as emerald. The morning sun shone warmly on this, and here a peacock lay, lazily basking, his jewelled plumage outspread in a maze of green and gold and lustrous blues.

Rock took in the beauty of the scene, and let his eye rest upon it for a moment. Then he drew a long breath, inhaling the fragrance of the roses, and finally closed the shutter of the Judas hole with a snap.

"Hast been within?" he asked.

"I have no means to open the gate," replied the sentry, and, tapping the rusty studs: "'Twould take a demi-culverin to blow this in, Cornet."

The Cornet grinned. He had seen stouter gates than that before him yield like a paper door to other means, but all he said was: "Keep careful watch. The worst time for a surprise is when all seems secure."

With this he left the sentry and continued his round.

By the time he had completed his work, doubling his guards, as he said he would, and making his reports, the sun was high up, and it approached the dinner hour.

It was Rock's habit to dine alone in his room, and he repaired thither a hungry man, with pleasant visions before him.

Like many a lean man the Cornet was gifted with a most healthy appetite. To a certain extent it was a flaw in his armour, and in his earlier and less cautious days his lawless foraging had once or twice brought him perilously near making the acquaintance of the provost-marshal.

But now there was good reason in excuse for him. He had toiled since dawn without bite or sup, and he was justifiably hungry; in short, he was famished, as he put it to himself.

On coming to his room he found, indeed, that his table was laid, but beyond this there was no sign of his meal. He paced the room for a little time impatiently, and then called for his orderly; but his orderly, who was in truth no other than our friend Job Hopkins, was not to be seen.

For a half-hour Rock waited, fuming with impatience, and then, boiling with wrath, he sought the men's quarters, and found them dining; but Hopkins was not there, nor had he been heard of.

For a moment his anger against the orderly almost made Rock forget his hunger. "'Tis the strapado for this, and double duty and double guards for a year—a whole year!" the Cornet muttered between his teeth, as he came back raging, determined now to forage for himself.

On his way back he passed the windows of the servants' dining-room, and a grateful odour of roast beef saluted him. He could not see within. Had he been able to do so he would have seen that which would have more than justified his anger against his truant orderly, for Job was there, finishing his dinner, and, oblivious of his duty, was deep in a tankard, his eyes fixed on Poily.

As it was, the Cornet could only sniff the odour of the feast, which he did with gusto; and then he suddenly made up his mind, and, entering the house, boldly sought the servants' hall. As he approached, however, there came to him the memory of Mistress Battersby. "She will be there," he muttered, and then, like a lean and hungry cat, fearing to advance, and yet not inclined to retreat, he paced up and down, pulling at his long moustaches, and inhaling the fragrant odour of the feast, which was so near and yet so unattainable, and of which there were signs that it would soon be ended.

A sudden bustle, a burst of laughter, and the sound of hurrying feet brought this home to Rock. Anxious only to secure a retreat, and careless in what way this was effected, he pushed at the door nearest to him; and as it swung back he saw a narrow passage, at the end of which a flight of steps ran downwards. Along the passage and down the stairway he fled with swift, silent footsteps, and on reaching the head of the stairway he found himself before another door. He placed his hand on this, and, as it swung back and he passed through, the Cornet found himself on a secluded terrace, over-

looking a portion of the garden. At the extreme end there was a seat ; but, except by the door through which he had entered, there was no further entrance or egress.

The Cornet walked straight up to the seat, and standing near it looked over the parapet. Beneath him he saw the tops of a row of copper-beech trees whilst beyond extended the maze of the shrubbery and on the right and left of him the ivy-clad walls of the great house arose.

"I will tarry here till they have gone," he muttered ; "the sunlight is warm on this seat." He turned round as the thought struck him, and then stood as if petrified, for at the other end of the terrace was Mistress Battersby herself, and she was coming straight towards him, a demure twinkle in her eyes, and with, perhaps, something of a heightened colour on her rosy cheeks.

The Cornet glanced to the right and left of him like a trapped rat ; but no escape lay there, unless he had wings to fly ; and then, as Mistress Battersby approached with a civil greeting, he drew himself up as close to the wall as possible, and with a "by your leave, madam," attempted to slide past,

and make his escape. But the lady had made up her mind, and was not to be denied. "'Tis a warm and sunny spot this, sir," she said. "I sit here daily after dinner. And I trust, Cornet," she continued, "that thy dinner was to thy liking to-day?"

The Cornet shuffled. "By your leave, madam, I have my duties."

"But not so soon after thy dinner—come, sit down on that seat, and sun thyself."

"Madam, I pray you excuse me. I go now to dine."

"What! Hast not dined yet? And thou hast not had bite nor sup since yester eve! That I know. Thou must be famishing."

The Cornet assented ruefully, and made another effort to escape, but Mistress Battersby put in:

"Nay, sir! This is too bad, and is but ill-credit to me. See! I will give thee thy dinner myself. Come! Nay, sir, I will take no denial! Come!" And the Cornet followed her like a lamb.

Mistress Battersby placed before him of her very best, and it was very good. In that cosy parlour, with the warm sunlight shining through the windows, and those deft white hands serving him

so noiselessly, Rock forgot his fears, and at last, as he gently sipped his wine, and listened to the humming of the bees outside, a great peace seemed to fall upon him.

Quiet and unobtrusive, his hostess sat a little apart from him, ready to attend to his slightest want. She spoke little; but somehow the Cornet began to talk of himself and the Thirty Years' War; and then Mistress Battersby listened with wrapt attention to tales of siege and battle, and marched with Duke Bernard through the duchies.

"Ay, sir!" she said, when he had finished the taking of Lauenburg, "but thou hast seen and done wonderful things. How many years hast thou served, didst say?"

"Thirty-four years and two months, madam," replied the Cornet.

"And hast never wearied of it? Never thought that the time hath come for rest?"

Her voice was soft and purring. The old wine was good and chased warmly through his veins. With the scent of the roses outside, the sleepy humming of the bees came in through the window, soothing him into a dreamy, languorous calm.

"Nay!" he said, and sipped his wine, "but I could fancy it."

There was a slight tap at the door; and this sound, which at another time would have made Rock start in guilty apprehension, had no effect upon him now. He merely stretched his long legs, and leaned back in his chair, as Mistress Battersby, with a brief "Excuse me for a moment, Cornet," arose and went to the door. As it opened Rock fancied he heard a slight exclamation; but even that did not affect him. He was, indeed, in the toils of Circe.

Mistress Battersby was away for a minute or so, and in that time Rock was in a dreamland. After all, why should he not take his ease? He had seen his day, and had been a careful man. "She is a most sensible woman," his thoughts ran on, "sensible and shrewd, her pasty is of the lightest. Eh? Why not, Rock?" And he slapped his thigh, and chuckled to himself; and then became cold all over at his own daring thoughts, and strove to set them aside; but they crowded in upon him, insistent as the buzzing of the bees.

And then Mistress Battersby returned: "I crave

thy pardon for leaving thee, Cornet ; but my lady had some orders for me."

"Ay, madam ! it must be a huge labour the control of this vast household ?"

"Dost think so, Cornet ?" and she laughed : "'Tis nothing to a good housewife : and when thy fancy taketh root, and thou seekest rest, Cornet, seek thou a good housewife, for single living is ill-living."

She had moved to a seat close to him as she spoke, and her eyes were full upon his face. The humming of the bees seemed to be loud as the murmuring of a sea now. The blood surged wildly through his veins. He felt the pulses in his temples throb. Hardly conscious of what he was doing, he bent slightly forward towards her, and then—he never knew how it happened ; but his hand was clasped in Marjorie Battersby's warm palm, her head was on his shoulder, and, wonder of wonders, he had kissed her !

When, a half-hour later, Cornet Rock was walking down the corridor that led to the great hall, he came face to face with Polly. Almost to his own surprise he made no effort to shrink into the wall ;

but pressed forward with a brazen confidence that was wonderful to see.

She made him a demure curtesy ; and there was an odd twinkle in her eyes, as she asked :

“ Dost know the saw about faint heart, Cornet ? ”
and then, before he could answer : “ Faint Heart ne'er won—nor need itself of Fair Lady ! ”

And she whisked round and was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COVENANT OF PATIENCE BURNSIDE.

"THE safe-conduct gone!"

And as Dorothy spoke she looked into Maunsell's sombre eyes as if she did not understand, did not realise, but looked only to read in them the confirmation of what he had just told her. The twain stood together in the embrasure of a window, the man sullen and short of speech, and the girl in bewilderment, almost in despair. She had put her faith in this; it was the only way, and now it was gone.

He had sought to tell her of the loss, to break the matter to her as gently as possible, and at the same time to tell her that there was yet a chance of Harden's escape; but he did not understand women, and it had come about that he had blurted out the thing in clumsy fashion. He had told her bluntly that the passport was gone, and then stood silent.

For a little she waited for some further word of explanation or hope, but Maunsell stood pulling at

his beard. He could not or would not enter into further detail.

"But," she continued, "you said you had it in your keeping. How has it gone? Who has it?"

"Cromwell."

"Cromwell!" she gasped; "but how did this happen? You promised to give it to me. I had your word for it. You should have given it to me last night. Oh, why did you not do so?"

"Because I could not. He claimed it from me last night and destroyed it; and, Lady Dorothy, I must warn you. He more than suspects—he knows that Harden is here."

He made no mention of the part that he had played, or the position he stood in now, but as he spoke her eyes sought his with a quick, questioning look—a look of suspicion and mistrust. What if he had done this on purpose? What if he had himself warned Cromwell, and thus freed himself from the promise of aid he had so strangely given? She had until a few hours ago known him only as the enemy of her house—as the man who was hunting his own kinsman and her lover to his death. 'Twas true he had held back when Harden was

under his hand, and given a momentary respite, and raised false hopes. But this was his cruelty—she had heard stories of that.

"And you think I am capable of this?" He had read her unspoken question—read it in her eyes, her air, her manner, and she shrank back a little from him as she said slowly:

"What else can I think? It was known but to you, myself, and my foster-sister."

"A secret shared between three is hard keeping," he said bitterly, "but how can you think this? Had I done so, do you imagine for a moment that I would have stayed my hand further, and that Harden would not now be before his judges? You wrong me, as you wronged me once before, and you will regret this as you regretted before; and more, it is useless for me to offer further help when I have not your trust."

With this he turned from her and walked down the gallery, hurt and indignant. She saw his tall figure, taller than ever, beneath the low-gabled roofing, move from her slow and stately, and as each step took him further away she felt that she was losing strength and support that she fain would

have. His words had convinced her ; she knew she was wrong, and this man was no traitor. Yet for a moment she struggled with herself. Two steps more and he had reached the door, when, as once before, she called him back.

"Colonel Maunsell!"

He wheeled round at her voice, stood for a second irresolute, and then he was once more by her side.

"I was wrong," she said ; "I am sorry, and I was wrong. Can you forgive me and help me yet?"

"There is nothing to forgive," he said gently, "and I am freer now to help than ever I was before, for Cromwell and I have parted, and I am here a prisoner on parole. Not one of the men who yesterday would have carried out my slightest nod would lift a finger for me to-day, and yet I am more free to aid you than yesterday."

She did and she did not understand. In a way she realised that a sacrifice had been made for her, but how or in what manner she knew not.

"I—I——" she began, but he restrained her with a slight gesture as he continued:

"I think there is a chance yet. For some purpose of his own, for some reason that I cannot

fathom, Cromwell has not yet acted on his knowledge. Perhaps he thinks Harden securely caged, and bides his time ; I know not. But the delay has given us a chance, and it would seem that in some strange manner aid is coming. Nay, listen ! It appears that Harden once rendered signal service to the minister Burnside and his daughter, and they are grateful. Burnside came here to-day to plead for Harden's life with Cromwell. His daughter met me, explained the object of his mission, and sought to know if there was hope. I could give her none. We had some little talk. I let her know that my hand was friendly, and the short of it is that both father and daughter are prepared to help, and they have a plan which I think will work as well as the lost safe-conduct. So there is hope yet."

"And for this, too, I have to thank you !"

"No ! But to thank hearts that can remember to be grateful. Such things are rare in these days—but Burnside has failed in his mission, and the two have gone off to arrange. What has to be done will have to be done to-night."

"But their plan ?"

"She will tell you herself. She will be here

at dusk this evening, and all will be ready—and warn Harden. He is safely bestowed, I trust?"

"Yes, in the secret chamber in Kenelm's Tower!"

"And they searched the tower twice—I once," and he laughed.

"There is a double wall and stairway in one portion."

She smiled again. "Well! I shall bring Mistress Burnside to you this evening. Where shall it be?"

"In the walled garden—we are safest there. You know the entrance?"

"Yes, from the chapel into the base of Kenelm's Tower, and thence into the garden."

A half-hour before the moon rose, and whilst light and shadow were merged in a dim twilight, the Gothic doorway of Kenelm's Tower opened softly, and a figure stole forth into the garden, keeping close to the base of the tower, where the shadows lay black and deep. It was Dorothy, and for a little she stood still, listening intently; but there was no sound except the plashing of a fountain, that lay concealed amidst a bower of red roses; though its

jet, cast high into the air, caught what light there was, and fell a murmuring silver spray into the lily-shaped basin below. Straight before her was the path that led to the outer gate, and she could see the summer house, snow white and glistening with its cover of roses. On her left, where the chapel walls met the old tower, was a maze of glorious bloom, and between this and the high encircling wall lay a retreat secure from all prying eyes. For here a pathway, arched over with climbing roses, led to the heart of the maze. At the head of this Dorothy stood and waited. The minutes seemed hours. Now and again the ivy stirred, and she started at the sound, though it was only some small bird that moved uneasily in its shelter amongst the leaves. Her nerves were at highest tension, and every sound, the fluttering of a bat's wing sweeping overhead, the swift, droning buzz of a beetle as it spun through the gloom, came to her with a sense of terror and evil that she could not overcome.

Would they never come? Had anything happened, and was it to be disaster after all.

She cast her eyes upwards, where black and tall the tower rose into the night.

"Oh, Kit!" she murmured, "to-night, to-night!"

And now a sound, harsh and loud, broke in upon her with a startling suddenness. It was the great gong in the courtyard, upon which the half-hour had been struck, and it pealed out loudly into the night, dying away at last in a shuddering, long-drawn note.

She shrank back far into the shadow at the sound; but when at last it died away, and all was still again, she came forth, and then she became aware of two dark shadows at the doorway of the tower. They were not ten paces from her, and there was no mistaking Maunseil. And that other figure, slim and tall! The figure, cloaked in a grey mantle and hood covering the features, that stood beside him! It was the friend whom God had sent to aid her in her straits, and she stepped forward eagerly.

"Thank God, you have come," she said; "I was afraid the worst had happened."

With a quick movement of her hand Patience removed her hood, and as it fell back Dorothy saw through the gloom a beautiful face, as pale as marble, the large eyes shining with a strange light in

them ; and then a voice, low and sweet, but which seemed to vibrate with emotion, answered her :

"Nay, lady! there is no fear! All goes well, and a" is arranged!"

Neither Maunsell nor Dorothy noticed the strange inflection in Patience's voice at the last words. Neither of them noticed the swift gleam of triumph in her eyes ; and Dorothy stretched forth her hands.

"You are Patience Burnside, I know. How can I thank you? How make return for this?"

With an effort, which the darkness alone concealed, Patience took the outstretched hands, returned their warm pressure, and then, as she freed herself gently :

"Yes, I am Patience Burnside! But speak not to me of thanks! I and mine seek but to repay a debt. And, lady, there is but little time for aught now but action. With the dawn my father and I leave for London—and—and—Sir Christopher can travel safely with us. By midnight my father and I will be in the woods yonder with two horses. The spot cannot be mistaken. It is near the grove of great yews," and she pointed with her finger to the

right of the gateway. "Sir Christopher must join us there, and once there he is safe. I will be waiting outside the walls, and guide him to the spot. Once he is free of Coombe Royal——"

"And herein lies the difficulty."

It was Maunsell who spoke, and as the two turned towards him he continued: "There will be a bright moon, and strict watch is kept. There is no means of Harden's passing out without being seen, and once seen there will be pursuit."

But Dorothy cut in: "There is a way that no one knows of. See here—follow me." And she turned swiftly and went down the arched pathway. Again she turned to the right, and in and out they went through the maze, Maunsell ever and again stooping his tall figure to avoid the rose-thorn twining overhead. At times they seemed to cross the same spot again and again, but at last they reached a trim archway, cut in the fantastic hedge already described, and through this they passed. A few steps further on and they were behind the summer-house, and here Dorothy stopped.

"Here," she said in a low whisper, "screened by the ivy, is a postern. So thick is the ivy on

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either side of the wall that the postern is invisible, and up to now no one has noticed it. See? It is open!" She lifted the ivy as she spoke, and there before them was an arched opening in the wall, as high as a man may stand.

"Through this," she said, "and 'tis scarce a hundred paces to the yews."

"One moment!" It was Maunsell who spoke, and slowly and cautiously he passed into the archway. The leaves fell over him softly. There was a moment's stillness, then another gentle rustling of the leaves, and all was quiet.

"He hath gone to see," whispered Patience, and then the two women listened intently, but there came no sound. Dorothy moved close up to her companion, the eyes of the two met, and Patience murmured: "He can escape this way, have no fear."

"And all this we owe to you! Oh, what angel sent you to us?" and Dorothy put her hand on her companion's shoulder. "What angel?" A wave of memory swept over the guilty woman's heart. She tried to meet Dorothy's glance, but could not, and then she moved herself. "Lady, I seek but to pay a debt; no—thank me not!" And she made

a movement as though to step back, but Dorothy's hand still kept its clinging pressure, and she drew Patience towards her.

"Oh!" she said, "but for you what would have happened? You have saved him for me"; and then, with a sudden, childlike gesture, she put up her face, saying, "Kiss me, Patience."

They were close to each other. Innocent eyes were looking into guilty eyes—eyes in which welled forth love and tenderness were looking into the hard, cold eyes of hate, bitter and inextinguishable. Her very words, "You have saved him for me," seared Patience like a red-hot brand. There as she stood in the girl's embrace her hand clasped the hilt of the dagger she carried now beneath her cloak; but no! It would spoil all. There was sweeter vengeance in store.

And then, ere she knew it, Dorothy's soft lips were on her cheek, and she felt their warm caress.

For one brief moment Patience Burnside thought that her strength would fail her, thought that the bands of her self-restraint would burst asunder, and show her to be what she was; but with an immense effort she controlled herself, and,

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clasping Dorothy in her arms, she kissed her fiercely and hotly. "Yea!" she said, "see! I have kissed thee, and let this be a seal and a covenant between us twain." And then, as suddenly as she had done this, she put Dorothy from her, and, stepping back, laid her finger to her lips: "Hark!" she said; "he returns."

And as she spoke there was a rustling of the leaves; once more the ivy parted, and Maunsell stood before them.

"The way is clear," he said; "the guards are doubled on the right and left of us, but the ground here is commanded by but one sentry, and he stands posted at the gate. As he turned I passed the narrow open space between me and the forest, and made my way to the yew trees. They are, as you said, scarce a hundred paces from the wall. I came back as I went, only the road was easier, for the knave of a sentry keeps lax watch. 'Tis that addle-headed fool Hopkins, and I fear me he weaves a halter for himself."

"Job Hopkins!" exclaimed Dorothy. "The very stars are fighting for us. He is on our side. He is with us."

"And our side is partly with him now," said Maunsell a little grimly; "for if I mistake not your maid is relieving the tedium of his duty."

"Then we are safe," said Dorothy, with a smile.

"Quite safe." It was Patience's low voice that broke in upon them, and then, as she pointed overhead: "But, see! the moon hath risen, and I have far to go."

It was as she had said, and the grey gloom of the twilight had given place to the soft radiance of the moon. Soon it would be almost as bright and clear as day, and even now, from where they stood within the shadow of the wall, they saw the wan outlines of the trees. Those pleasaunce take to themselves form and substance, and the hazy shadow of Coombe Royal slowly resolve itself, until the great pile stood forth clear and distinct, whilst from the battlements of Kenelm's Tower there came to them the hooting of the great owl, as he welcomed the queen of the night.

"Come," said Maunsell, "it is time to be doing. We have scarce four hours now."

Back they went, all three together, still keeping to the shadow of the wall, and moving softly and

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cautiously. When they reached Kenelm's Tower, Patience, who was a little in advance, turned and stayed them.

"I must go first and alone," she said. "Nay! no soul will hinder me; and now, till midnight, good-bye."

She had slipped her hood over her head, and stood with one hand clasping the folds at her throat as she spoke. With her last words she stepped quickly through the door, taking no heed of Dorothy's outstretched hand, and the next moment she was gone.

"She is a strange girl," said Dorothy; "at times I almost fear her, but——"

"It is she, and she alone, who can save Harden now," said Maunsell gravely. He, too, had, earlier in the day, noticed the peculiar nervous excitement under which Patience Burnside laboured, and he had drawn his own conclusions. Based upon truth though they were, they were wrong, and he thought that Patience Burnside was in the agony of a great sacrifice, whilst her heart was thirsting for the revenge that was coming so near, and would soon be her own.

And now that they were alone together Maunsell returned to his stiff and formal manner.

"Madam!" he said, "I pray you now to warn Harden." He checked himself for a moment, and then continued: "It would be well if we could meet, if only for a few moments. I think it is safe here, and I will await him near the fountain."

"I will tell him," she said, and then, with a quick and sudden earnestness: "Colonel Maunsell, do you think all will go well? Tell me? I want to know what is in your heart of hearts."

She looked up at him with shining, eager eyes, but the question, the hope, the love in them that he saw in the moonlight—not one of these was for him. What would he not give if that were his? It were worth the price of a man's life twice over. All this was in his heart, but other words came from his lips.

"All will go well. There may, however, be a man's work to do, and I will be here to help. I will not stir from here till all is over; and now go and send him to me."

He watched her as she passed through the arch, and then, slowly turning, walked towards the fountain, and sat down on the edge of the basin.

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He began to cast up the account of the past few days with himself. He had thrown away his career, and perhaps his fortune and his life, for what was after all but a dream. He would never win the prize. He knew this now, and yet he was here, ready to die if need be, to save the other, unworthy though he knew him—to save him for her. It was a sacrifice far greater to him than fortune or life. After all, why should he? He had but to let events take their course, and then——! He arose and stood to the full of his great height, his harsh face almost livid with the mental conflict within. Twice he made a step forwards to the door of the tower, and twice he stepped back, and then his better nature, his strong good heart, came to his aid.

"I will save him," he muttered thickly to himself, "save him if man can do so."

And then he stood dreaming over the fountain, watching the spray falling on the surface of the water in the basin, beating it into tiny wavelets of silver and gold.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BETRAYAL.

AND as Black Tony sat there, staring into the trembling waters of the fountain, a man came up with stealthy, noiseless footsteps, and stood behind him, a man with a drawn rapier in his right hand, a short cloak thrown back over his shoulders, and his long, fair, Cavalier locks covered by a hat with drooping plumes. For an instant he watched the brooding figure before him, a strange, half-mocking smile upon his lips, and then :

“ Well, Tony, I have come ! ”

Maunsell sprang to his feet, and, wheeling round, faced the speaker ; and the two kinsmen, once friends as well as kinsmen, had met again after long years.

There was no pretence of hand-shaking or other friendly greeting between them. Things had happened in the past that made this utterly impossible. For one brief second Maunsell stood grimly silent, towering a head above the other, his dark face stern and set.

He was going to save this man. If necessary he would sacrifice his life for him; but between the two there was a gulf that could never be bridged; and so his voice was icy in its coldness as he spoke.

"I am glad you have come; I have something of import for you."

"Ah! Quite the old manner! Time makes no change in you, dear coz—but say what you have to say quickly, and leave out the homily if there be one, for there is danger in the air here for me."

Soft and even was Harden's voice; indeed, it was scarce raised above a whisper; but Maunsell caught the mocking glitter in his kinsman's eyes, the veiled hatred in his tone; but all this was nothing to him now.

"I have no homily to read," he said slowly. "To-night, with God's help, you will be free; but it is far from here to your French refuge, and you will need money."

"Exactly! You have uncommon perception. I need money, need it badly. I always need it, and will be glad to borrow from you—some of my own rents of Hardenholt."

Still Maunsell took no notice of the insult in his tone and manner; but handed him a purse.

"Here then is that which will meet your present wants. There are a hundred guineas."

Harden took the purse, and poised it in his hand.

"Faith!" he said, "'tis a comfortable weight, and 'tis long since I have felt a burden so pleasant," and then, slipping it away into his doublet, he drawled out, "Verily, thou art a St. Martin in thy charity, dear coz! I had truly expected the cold comfort of thy good advice, but, beshrew me!" and he tapped his breast, "this is, indeed, a surprise!"

And then, as if some devil moved him, he began to speak as it were to himself, his voice low and level, with scarce an inflection, but each word barbed with insult.

"*Peste!* Whence comes this milk of kindness in Tony's heart? Ah, I see! He has discovered the power of a pair of blue eyes—but they shine not for Tony, but for me—I, the outcast, the rebel, the doomed. But it was ever so, was it not, Tony? Mind you the little affair that parted us—we were as Damon and Pythias then. Dost know what became of her?"

"Silence!" said Maunsell in low, growling tones, "and go! You have your chance now."

Harden stepped back a pace, and lightly raised the point of his sword. He was in his most reckless and dangerous mood, and nothing could stay him.

"Come!" he said, "there is yet time for a word between us, and 'tis years since we have met. Listen, my son of Anak! The prize you hope to win will never be yours, she and her lands are mine. I have taken care of that," he said, with a devilish meaning in his voice, as he went on, "You grasp it? She must either be Lady Harden or——"

But he never finished his speech. With a smothered cry Maunsell sprang forward, and seized him in a grasp of iron. So swiftly and suddenly was this done that the other had not time even to raise his sword, and in a moment it was twisted out of his hand and flung on the pathway. He, Harden, put forth all his lissom strength, but he was a child in those giant arms that gripped him like a vice, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Dog!" said Maunsell, "but for my promise to her I would slay you here—not with a sword.

Nay, I would give you no such chance. Now, mark me!" he continued, as the other writhed beneath the pain of his hold, "one word more like this and I will kill you—kill you out of hand. One other whisper of this, and the seas will not be wide enough to save you. Coward and liar! Mark this and go—go—lest my anger be too much for me."

With this he flung Harden from him, so that he staggered across the pathway, white to the lips. As he passed the spot where his rapier lay, however, he pulled himself together with an immense effort. Quick as thought he bent down and seized the blade; but he was reckoning with one as quick as himself. 'ere he could make another movement his wrist was held once more in Maunsell's grasp.

"You would strike a felon blow, would you?" he growled into Harden's ear. "Have you thought of the consequences? You will hang like a dog, as you deserve to hang, by the morning."

"My God!" hissed the other; "draw then—draw! Let me free!"

"Not now or here; but I give you my word that I will cross over to France and meet you when and where you like."

"You will—you promise that!" And Harden's eyes flashed fire.

"I promise on my honour." And Maunsell loosed his hold from Harden's wrist.

"Very well! I will wait thee then; and then——"

"'Twill be either you or I, Christopher Harden."

Kit Harden would perhaps have made some answer, but at the moment the sharp challenge of a sentry rang out, and then another, and another.

"Back!" said Maunsell, "back to your refuge!"

And without a word the Cavalier turned and slid into the darkness.

Antony Maunsell listened to the tramp of feet outside the walls. Now and again a hoarse voice reached his ears, and then all was still.

"The rounds," he muttered; "and now all is well till the small hours." Saying this, he moved gently to the tower, and passing through the door found himself in a small vaulted room. Beyond this again was a small Norman arch that led into the chapel, and through this Maunsell passed. As he entered the chapel something seemed to move, and he fancied he heard a light footstep. He

glanced quickly around, but could see nothing, for all was darkness, save where through a wheel-window a broad band of moonlight fell across the chapel, showing indistinctly the dim, groined roofing, and tattered and faded banners that hung on the walls.

With something like a sigh, he sat himself down on the altar steps, facing the dim aisle, and waited for midnight; and here we will leave him, victor over himself, and follow Patience Burnside on her road to vengeance. She had left Dorothy and Maunsell in the pleasaunce, with a lie on her lips and fury in her heart. With rapid and light footsteps, she crossed the chapel and entered the long gallery beyond. All had gone as she had hoped and planned, and now a word in Cromwell's ear and it was done.

She had made her arrangements well, and, as she reached the end of the passage, a man stepped through the doorway and met her almost face to face. It was Ireton, and it was not chance that brought him there.

"We are both punctual," he said; but she broke in upon his speech:

"Take me to him," she said; "I must see him

at once. "There must be no delay." Ireton heard the words as they were hissed through her clenched, white teeth, and from beneath the shadow of her hood he saw, uncertain though the light was, the unutterable hate in her eyes. Even he, hard and cold as steel, almost shuddered as he caught that glance.

"Come!" he said; "follow me."

And he led the way past the great hall, through the octagon chamber, and up the spiral stairway, until at last they stood before a closed door.

"Wait here!" said Ireton briefly, and, softly opening the door, passed in. Cromwell was at his work table, but the pen he held in his hand was idle, and he seemed lost in thought. As Ireton entered, he looked up at him with inquiry in his glance.

"She has come, your Highness. Shall I admit her?"

"Art sure this is no trick, Ireton? Art sure she comes not to plead her father's pleading?"

"My lord, I am sure of it. There is no mercy in her eyes."

For a moment the two looked at each other,

and Cromwell laughed shortly, a harsh, unmusical laugh.

"Send her to me," he said, "and go for Pride. I must see you both as soon as she has gone."

Ireton bowed, and passed out of the room, and as he did so Cromwell crushed the quill he held in his fingers, as he muttered to himself:

"What new tangle is this?"

And as the words fell from his lips the door opened and Patience entered—a tall, slight figure. She had thrown back her hood, and Cromwell saw before him the beautiful features, pale as death, with those strange luminous eyes that met his look as if they would read into his very soul.

"Maid!" he said, "what brings you here?"

A shiver ran through Patience as he spoke, and Cromwell had to repeat his question before she answered.

"I come with news of the Malignant Harden's hiding-place."

"You?"

There was that in the Lord Protector's tone that made the blood rush like flame to Patience's face. She half raised her hand as if to ward a blow. For

a moment she seemed to cower and shrink back ; but with an effort she gathered herself together, and, pale once more, except for two bright spots that burned now on her cheeks, she gasped out :

“ Yes, I ! ”

Cromwell rose from his chair and approached her. A strange expression had come across his rugged features, the harsh lines seemed to disappear, and for once the grating voice was soft and deep.

“ You ! And this man hath done great service to you. He hath saved your father’s life and yours—and you would betray him ? ”

The wretched girl had not expected this—anything but this, and each word that Cromwell spoke cut her to the quick. She had expected some few cold, stern words of thanks, some icy mention of the blood-money—the very thought made her shudder—but this, but this ! That deep voice that vibrated with kindness awoke as with a magic touch the better nature within her, and she saw herself as she was. But it was for a moment only. She had gone too far to step back now, and again the light of madness gleamed in her eyes as she answered :

"He is accursed amongst the followers of Ahaz!"

"Have you no gratitude?"

It was almost too much, and a sob burst from Patience; but again she steeled herself—she would not see him live for her, that other whose kiss still burned upon her lips.

"Cromwell!" she said, her voice a-thrill, her frame shaking as if struck by an ague; "ask me not why or wherefore I do this—perchance it is the blood-money, and we are poor. Let it be so! You want the traitor, and I give him to you. It is enough for you, is it not?"

The kindly light in Cromwell's eyes went out as she spoke, and once more his voice was harsh and metallic.

"True! It is enough! Where is Harden?"

"Here!" she gasped; "here in Coombe Royal!"

"So much I guessed; nay, knew already. I must learn more."

"Then listen. He lies hidden in the secret chamber in Kenelm's Tower, and to-night will attempt escape."

"Ah!"

"Yes, with the aid of Maunsell and Lady Capel.

I wormed the secret from the traitor Maunsell by offering my aid. They trust me, and—and I hate them."

"Come," interrupted Cromwell, almost roughly, "to the point, girl. I would know the plan of escape."

And in low, rapid tones Patience told him all, told him in the fullest detail, and, when it was all over, Cromwell turned from her without a word and walked to the window. For a moment or so he stood there, looking out into the night, and then, facing round, stepped up to Patience.

"Thou hast earned the reward, and it shall be paid thee. Go now and be silent. Thou art near thy desire." And she, whom Harden had dragged so low, went forth with bowed head and tottering footsteps. It was all over now, and even if she gave her life for it she could not recall what she had done. She had tasted of her vengeance; but the bitterness of it, which should have been so sweet! With a low, moaning cry, she fled down the dim gallery, a ghostly figure—fled past two men who stood together in earnest converse, and who looked after her with curious eyes as she went by.

She was not conscious as to where her footsteps led her ; and, as if impelled by a strange and irresistible power, they took her back the way she had come. She was once again in the chapel. She passed down the dark aisle behind the shadow of the pillars, all unseeing, and unseen by that other who sat with bowed head on the altar steps. Light and noiseless as a thing of air, she flitted through the vaulted chamber at the base of Kenelm's Tower, and it was only when she felt the cool, scent-laden air of the rose garden that she began to realise where she was. She shrank out of the moonlight deep into the shadow, and cowered against the grey and moss-grown wall. Regrets, remorse, a hundred memories tore at her heart. Her burning eyes glanced pitifully around, as if seeking for help ; and a sob burst from her.

"What have I done? What have I done?" she moaned. "Oh, if I could undo it!" And she leaned her hot forehead against the cool stones, and stood there trembling. God pity and help her, poor wretch! For as she stood there the madness came over her again, and she tore at the wall beside her like a wild thing, tore at it until her fingers bled.

"Never!" she gasped, "never for her! My God! I know myself! I hate myself for the vile thing I am—but he—he made me this. O, Harden! Harden!"

And with a low moan she sank down shuddering into the black shadow.

And he, the uncrowned king, the man before whom she had unveiled her heart, stood for a moment as she left him, a strange smile upon his face.

"Ay, jealousy," he said, "thou hast a she-wolf's heart!" With this he turned heavily and sank into a chair, the harsh features grim and set. "I see it all now," his thoughts ran on; "that fury has given me the key—but I was right, I guessed it before. And Maunsell plays the traitor. Maunsell has cast aside his wealth, his honours, his old friendship with me—for what? For a love that is not his. And he and that girl think to play a rubber with me—with me!" And he laughed grimly, and then on the instant his mood changed, and the stern brows were knit. "No!" he said, "there can be no mercy in this—Harden must die!"

He rose once more, but stood in hesitation. This

was not his way ; but for once a hundred memories came crowding upon him ; and with these Ireton's own pleading : " Cut not Benjamin off entirely ! "

His hands were red with blood, and there was one stain that no time could efface. Once again he stood behind the barred window, watching the restless crowd before Whitehall, and watching, too, that other thing, that high, black scaffold where his King was to die—done to death by his hands. He seemed to hear the shuddering murmurs from below, and above them all rose one voice, a girl's voice, clear and distinct :

" Yes ! your King, General Cromwell ! Your King and mine ! "

He passed his hand across his forehead with a quick and rapid movement.

" Death ! " he muttered, " it is ever in my path. It is ever for me the only way—but this——"

He checked himself, and, with a sudden resolution in his voice, called out :

" Ireton ! "

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NET CLOSES.

AT the sound of his voice the door swung open noiselessly, and Ireton entered, his clear-cut face, calm and severe, in marked contrast to the rugged granite of Cromwell's features.

"She hath told me all," said Cromwell, "and confessed all."

"And broken her heart in the doing of it," came the answer. "Pride and I saw her go moaning down the gallery like a lost soul. She passed within a foot of us."

The shadow of his hat hid the expression that came over Cromwell's face as Ireton spoke, and then he said slowly:

"Nay, Ireton! The heart-breaking was done before, else she had never come to this. She is mad, mad with the sting of a great wrong, and mad with jealousy, and as merciless as a tigress. I saw it in her face when she came in, and my heart smote

me ; and I—I gave her her chance—but she wants blood, and will have it.”

“It is then as we thought——”

“Yes ; to the hilt and more ! Listen !” And in a few brief words—dry, incisive words—that left no doubt as to their meaning, and made all as clear as day, Cromwell sketched the plan of the escape. When he ended, Ireton glanced at the horologe.

“There is more than an hour yet,” he said, “and they suspect nothing. Shall I arrest Lady Capel and Maunsell, and force the tower ?” And even as he spoke he made a half-movement to the door, in eager anticipation of Cromwell’s approval ; but with a motion of his hand the latter stayed him.

“Nay !” he said, “this is a rubber which I shall play. Is Pride in waiting ?”

“Yes, your Highness.”

“Then, without noise or bustle let a dozen men, well armed, be assembled without the gate, and let it be done quickly and silently ; we have but little time.”

The shadow of a smile flitted across Ireton’s face as he answered : “We guessed there would be work, and all is ready even now.”

A grim smile of approval unbent Cromwell's lips, and he asked :

" Who is in command ? "

" The Cornet Rockz, your Highness."

" Ah ! "

Ireton caught the doubt in the exclamation. " Mistake him not, your Highness," he said ; " the Cornet is an old and tried soldier, a veteran of many years——"

But Cromwell broke in upon his words : " Let be, let be, Ireton, and come ! " And with this he moved to the door, followed by Ireton. Outside they found Pride, and, as once before, the three went down the gallery together, their long shadows, like huge phantoms, preceding them.

At the entrance of the great hall stood a sentry, who presented arms, and gazed after the three with curious eyes as they passed out into the night, and then resumed his monotonous tramp up and down, his footfalls echoing sullenly to his tread.

Near the gate of the courtyard, drawn up in the shadow, stood Rock and his men, and here the three stopped. Rock was called up, and there was a whispered talk for a few seconds, and then Pride,

taking the Cornet a little aside, gave him some orders in a low tone. In as low a tone the command to march was given, and they moved off, Cromwell leading with Pride at his elbow. Ireton had dropped behind, and was engaged in whispered converse with Rock.

Even through the uncertain moonlight Cromwell's quick eye discovered the doubled guards, and he asked Pride :

"When was this done?"

"This evening, your Highness. We have prepared for everything."

Cromwell made no answer, and the party took their way at a more rapid pace, keeping well in the shadow of the trees.

A few steps brought them opposite to the east wing, and Pride gave an order to halt.

Cromwell glanced at the house. "Lady Capel's apartments are there, are they not?"

And Ireton, who had joined him, replied : "Yes. Where the lights burn at those windows."

"Are all the approaches guarded?"

"Naught, save a bat, could pass without being seen."

"And these," asked Cromwell, "are the yews?" And he pointed to his left front, where three dark shadows rose above a low belt of trees, and stood athwart the opal night.

"Yes, and Burnside should be there by now."

"Then let the arrest be made at once. Cornet Rock, this is thy part. Remember that he is old, and should be easily taken. Remember, too, that I want him living. Bring him to the gateway in the walled garden yonder. We will await thee there—be swift and sure."

Rock saluted and stepped back. "Mauley!" he said, "come thou with me!" And the twain, detaching themselves from the others, went forward with quick but cautious steps.

In the meantime, all unconscious of the foe that was upon his footsteps, Burnside stood beneath the yews, deep in their shadow. Linked together, and by his side, were two stout horses, and he held the reins lightly but firmly, now and again caressing the fretting bay that bore a pillion on its saddle.

In his younger days, far, far back, he had carried a sword and won a spur, and the excitement of the moment had, with the power of the fabled elixir of

youth, given the old pastor a strange, nervous strength, and for the time he felt the blood run warmly through his veins, and felt, too, as if his hand possessed the strength of thirty years ago.

He had been there for a half-hour—a half-hour that seemed ages, and as the minutes passed and there was no sign of his daughter, a nervous reaction set in, and the warmed blood chilled once more, the flushed face grew pale and wan.

Now and again he would crane forward from the darkness and peer into the shimmering haze in front of him, expecting each moment to see the figure of his daughter coming towards him; but there was no sign of her. He tried to strengthen himself with the hope that she would herself bring Harden; but fear and doubt followed upon this, and soon his mind was a prey to a hundred presentiments of ill and disaster.

Once again he strove to pierce the night with his eyes, and as he looked he fancied he saw someone approaching. Yes; there were two figures moving! They had come at last, and his heart began to beat once more, beat only to chill again; for as he looked he began to realise that in the

ghostly light he had taken stunted trees for human figures, and he stepped back with a groan.

But what was that which made the bay so restive? And that other, the quiet sorrel, was moving uneasily, and the pastor felt his hold on the reins weaken.

He was reaching out his arm to caress the bay, when there came a sharp crack, as of a dry twig breaking behind him, and then the leaves rustled as if a heavy body had forced its way past them. He turned to look; but in that moment the horses plunged and reared. The reins slipped from his hand, and the bay with a snort turned and galloped away, blundering through the forest; but a figure had arisen from the earth as it were, and held the sorrel, whilst another, a drawn sword in its hand, was by his side, and a voice called out in low, grim tones:

"Master Burnside, thou art my prisoner! I arrest thee in the name of the Lord Protector."

He made no answer, but stood stunned and bewildered.

His hat had fallen off, and the moonlight fell on his silver hair and white, drawn features, so thin and

pale that Rock's heart smote him; but at that moment Mauley's harsh voice broke in upon them, as he thrust his face forward, scowling savagely at the captive. "Priest of Baal! Betrayer of thy people! Behold, the fires have been kindled beneath thee, and thou wilt pass now into a land which thou knowest not."

But a strong hand thrust him back, and deep and stern was Rock's voice. "Back," he said, "back, and be still. Thou forgettest thy place. Loose the horse, it is not wanted, and not a word more."

Mauley fell back before the fierce glance and grim tones of the Cornet, who turned to Burnside.

"Master Burnside," he said, and his voice was kind, "this is no soldier's task that hath been set me, and I would it had been another to whom it was given; but his Highness awaits us yonder—come!"

And, placing his arm in Burnside's, he led him forward, still silent and unresisting. Once only did he moan out:

"My daughter Patience!"

"Fear not!" said the Cornet, "there is no harm

for her, and——” But here he stammered and checked himself. He was going to say that Burnside also was safe from harm ; but who knew what lay within the Lord Protector’s heart ?

Slowly Rock led his prisoner across the narrow, open track until they reached the high, ivy-grown wall of the pleasance, and then a figure stepped out of the shadow and approached them. It was Pride.

“Thou hast thy man, Rock ?” he said in a low tone ; and the answer came :

“He is before thee, Colonel.”

“Good ! His Highness will see him hereafter. In the meantime keep him there in the shadow, with two men to watch him. Thou and Mauley are wanted elsewhere.”

Rock did as he was bidden, and then joined the others.

At the corner of the wall they halted, and Rock, who was leading, stepped out cautiously. In front of him lay the gateway with its two towers, and in the flood of the moonlight before the gate a sentry stood, his carbine at the support, and staring into the forest. It was Job Hopkins, and Rock’s eye

twinkled with a malicious light, as he thought of certain things, and thought, too, how he would make the knave smart for his laxness. Here he was not thirty paces from him, in the full of the moonlight, and the oaf saw nothing ; but stood there dreaming, for all the world like a wooden image !

But if the truth was known, there was excuse for Job. Apart from the fact that he had stood there for hours—part of Rock's disciplinary measures—he was on the cross with anxiety of mind. For that very evening he and Polly Maple had parted for ever, as she said, and she had added thereto a threat, in respect to a certain Gideon, that made Hopkins' blood hot with anger and tore his heart with jealousy. And there was a certain pathos in this all, too, for that evening Polly had set a price on herself, and it was simply that Hopkins should see nothing of that which was to happen, and let Harden pass. And to his honour be it said that Job Hopkins had refused. Polly cajoled and coaxed, but Job remained firm. At last she threatened, and the mention of Gideon had roused a flame of anger in his heart which gave him strength to hold out. He made his choice—made it like a man.

"Lass," he said, "I love thee well; but whilst I wear this at my side," and he touched the steel hilt of the sword, "I cannot—I cannot."

She looked at him through the white moonlight, and loved him for his sturdy honesty, loved him as she never loved before; and it was then that she played her last card, and threatened him. It was enough. He turned upon her white and stern: "Thou wouldst tempt me to shame?" he said. "And if so be that thou wouldst part, go in peace, and let there be naught between us henceforth, as thou sayest."

Had he only known it, Job was victor, utter and glorious, and for one brief, trembling moment Polly was about to yield and beg his forgiveness. As it was, however, she simply turned her back upon him, went away with never a word, humming a snatch in a quavering voice, but with her eyes full of tears.

And Job! He cursed the wiles and duplicity of women in general, and Polly in particular, and thanked God he was rid of her, and then all the love that was deep in his honest heart welled up, and he might be forgiven the sob that shook his sturdy frame as he stood there at his post, most

miserable of men and utterly forlorn. Oaf and yokel though he was, he knew what it was to love, as truly as any fine gentleman in lace ruffles, and so he stood there through the long hours with a breaking heart, careless of all things, thinking only of this one thing that was to him more than life.

It was at this moment that Rock had stepped out into the light.

"Hey! hey!" he chuckled, "'twill be the dumb-horse and the cells for this, and maybe a halter."

There was a crisp step by his side, and the sound reached the sentry. In a moment he had swung round and pointed his carbine.

"Halt!" he said, "or I fire!"

And they saw the red glow of the match glint on the barrel as he aimed at them.

But a voice, harsh and stern, a voice that chilled Job to the marrow, uttered the command.

"Hold, and to attention! 'Tis I!"

In the terror of the moment Job almost dropped his weapon; but he somehow managed to recover himself. By that time Cromwell was by his side.

"Cornet Rock!" he said, pointing to Job, "thou needst more discipline here."

Rock ground his teeth. Another reproof, and all due to this hulking fool!

"He shall have it, General," he said. "Here, Truscott, Price, arrest this knave! He will be dealt with in the morning."

Job surrendered without a word. All things were even with him now, and, as he was marched off between the two dragoons, Cromwell said:

"I want this gate opened."

Rock fumbled with a soft leather knapsack he wore slung over his left shoulder, and produced therefrom a small phial and a monstrous key. The contents of the phial he poured into the lock, and smeared over the bolt. Then, inserting the key, he turned it with an effort, and the lock opened noiselessly.

"The gate will creak, General," said Rock, as he thrust the oiled key and the phial in his sack.

"Push it back sufficient to admit one man—that will be sufficient."

Rock put his shoulder to the massive door and pushed—once, twice, and then with a harsh creak the gate swung back wide enough for two men to pass in abreast.

"Enough!" said Cromwell, and held up his hand as if to enjoin silence, but save for that dismal creak there was no sound.

After a moment or so Cromwell put down his hand. "'Twas a false move," he muttered, "and might have lost all," and then, turning to Rock:

"Place thou a sentry here—one who can be trusted. Let him conceal himself there," and he pointed to the thick ivy, "and let him stop all egress. Shoot if there be any resistance—even the slightest."

"Mauley!" said Rock, "take this post. You understand the orders."

"Yes, Cornet!" and, glib as a parrot, Peter Mauley repeated Cromwell's injunctions.

"And now, Ireton," Cromwell said, "bring four men with you, and follow me. Pride! Fall back with the rest behind the wall there. If I whistle—to me!"

Slowly and softly they crept in, keeping in the deep shadow of the wall; and as they went on Cromwell whispered to Ireton:

"This brings back old days. Faith! I have known nothing like this since I stood sentry at the Blue Boar."

"God grant this may end as well."

"Tush, Ireton; thou croakest like a raven. But here—post thy men here in the blackest shadow. Remember, they are to make no movement, make no sign, until I myself give the word. On their lives be it! Post them, and join me. I am going there." And he pointed to the summer-house.

Ireton murmured something in a low tone, and fell back; and Cromwell, still keeping under cover of the rose hedge, reached the summer-house and entered softly. Through the struggling moonlight he saw a rustic table and a seat before him, and, leaning one hand upon the table, he put aside the roses with the other and glanced out. The glory of the garden was before him; and beyond, where tree and shrub faded away in the moonlight to soft, billowy shadows, was the Norman keep of Coombe Royal, with here and there a light burning like a glow-worm from out of its sombre façade. A little to the right, half in shadow and half in inky blackness, Kenelm's Tower stood squarely out, and as his eyes fell on this there was a soft step at his side. It was Ireton.

"All is ready, your Highness," he whispered.

Cromwell put down his upraised arm, and the clustering roses fell softly together.

"Back then to thy post, Ireton. Remember, no movement till I call"

"Would it not be well if I were to remain?"

"Nay, Ireton! There is no fear!" And as he answered, his sword glittered in his hand.

Ireton stepped back as softly as he had come, and Cromwell was once more alone. The night, the air, the time had a strange fascination for him. Once more he put aside the roses, and watched the dim lights. The minutes passed slowly. The silence was intense. Then a light went out, then another and another, and the huge keep was in darkness, except for one small glimmering ray that shone faintly through a dormer window.

And then, with the spell of the hour upon him, Cromwell began to commune with himself.

"Ay!" he murmured, "one by one they go, and all in darkness save for that small beam," and he pointed to the little light, "that beam that shines there like a hope. And so I stand, as that grim tower, an equal gloom; but the Almighty Hand hath spared me not a ray." He paused, and then

continued: "What said I? I blaspheme. I have my hope, my guide." He held the gleaming blade of his sword before him. "O, God of Battles! Thou hast blessed this blade, and with its edge hath smitten to the death the Dragon that oppressed my England. From now let there be peace." He slowly sheathed his sword, and, turning, stepped to the door of the summer-house. He was before the square of turf, and the glistening pathway was beyond. He let his eyes run through the opal light.

"This moon throws strange shadows," he murmured, and then a hand gently touched his sleeve, and Ireton's dark face was at his shoulder.

"What is it?" whispered Cromwell.

Without a word Ireton pointed in the direction of the tower.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ROSE PLEAUNCE.

OF all nights this night in June was one that Dorothy Capel was never to forget. The heavy air was hot and oppressive, the silence deathlike in its stillness. The flowers in the vases, scattered here and there about the room, drooped in a languorous swoon, and, soft though it was, the light of the candles in their rare silver holders seemed to burn and pain her eyes. One by one she put them out, and then, seating herself at her bow-window, looked forth into the quiet night. For an hour or more she remained thus, her head resting in her hands, hoping, fearing, and waiting.

Then a sound came to her—the muffled tread of tramping feet. She arose, and, standing concealed from view behind the curtains, peered out with straining eyes and ears. There it was again! There could be no mistake—men were moving, and moving warily, without the walls. Then something glittered in the shadow and was gone. It was a

drawn sword that had caught the moonlight, and flashed it back in a ray of fire. At last she saw them, a small, compact body that passed a little belt of light, and was lost in the darkness almost as soon as she marked them.

The stillness that followed was now all but intolerable. She tried to hearten herself with the thought that, after all, these might be the guards that nightly patrolled the house. Night after night she heard them, the challenge of the sentries and the exchange of the password.

But this night it was different. There was no challenge—nothing except that steady, muffled tramp, and then a strange and eerie silence. Could it be? She gasped and trembled at the thought. No, no! It was impossible! The plan was too well laid, and there were loving hearts with her, not traitors—and yet! She sank on her knees at the window. "O God," she prayed, "aid and protect him now! Shield him with Thy strength." And then there was a sudden plunging sound, a faint cry, and the beat of galloping hoofs, going ding-dong through the night.

She sprang to her feet, her face all flushed, her

bosom heaving. It could mean but one thing. Her prayer was answered, and Harden was free! There were no sounds of pursuit, nor could she hear now the beat of those racing hoofs as they sped through the night. He was free! He was free! Thank God! Thank God! And then she remembered, and paled once more. Swift and light she turned and ran into the inner room. With trembling fingers she pressed the spring in the alcove. The door slid back, and she groped her way up the dark stairway to Harden's refuge. As she approached she saw the door was open, and a straggling ray of moonlight showed the dim chamber beyond.

"Harden!" she called out. "Kit!"

There was no answer, and she passed in with timid footsteps. The room was empty, and he had gone. There could be no doubt of it now. He had escaped; and, kneeling down once more, she thanked God for His mercy shown. Slowly she arose, and went back as she had come, her face alight, her eyes shining.

But why was it that none came to tell her—to give the glad tidings? It was late. Something detained Maunsell. And then an irresistible impulse

seized her. She would go down to the rose pleasaunce and see with her own eyes. She snatched up the grey cloak—the same she had worn when she had slipped through the forest to meet her lover. She passed like a ghost through the ladies' gallery, where all was in gloom.

When she reached the passage beyond, however, she stopped and hesitated. The windows were thrown wide open, and it was in a flood of white moonlight, and there, not ten paces from her, stood a sentry, a tall, heavy-looking man, with the moon rays rippling on his polished corselet. For a moment she stood in uncertainty; but there was no way but this or back—and she could not go back. And then she boldly advanced into the light.

The eyes of the sentry twinkled as he turned and faced her. He thought her to be one of the maids—Polly Maple, perhaps. There was some little relaxation here, a pleasant episode of his guard, and he laughed a hoarse, boorish laugh, as he called out:

"Halt, little maid, and give the password!"

"I am late," said Dorothy hastily; "let me pass, please."

"For a kiss, I may, Sweetlips!" he answered coarsely. "Come, then—buss me, lass!"

And, leaning his carbine against the wall, he stepped up to her chuckling and leering.

Dorothy made no movement; but as he came up she threw back her hood, and faced him, her eyes aflame.

"Back, fool!" she said. But he had already recognised her, and stood staring in speechless amaze.

"Lady Capel!" he gasped.

But she broke in upon him. "Yes; Lady Capel! You know me now. Then let me pass at once—this instant, I say!"

The man began to mumble and stammer out some lame excuse; but Dorothy waited to hear no more, and left him where he was, staring after her as she went, and cursing himself in his heart for his folly. His boorish jest was like to cost him dear, and he knew this well.

But Dorothy had gone, and now, without further hindrance, reached the chapel door. Through this she passed with quick, hasty steps, but as she reached the aisle, all alight with a strange radiance that poured in from the stained-glass windows of the clerestory, a tall, dark figure stepped from behind a pillar and faced her.

"Lady Capel! You here?"

She started back with a little cry, but the next moment she had recognised Maunsell.

"Oh!" she said, "I was coming to you. He has gone, has he not? He is safe?"

"Not yet," was the answer; "it is just time, and I am going now, as I promised, in case my aid is needed. Stay here till I return."

She looked at him for a moment speechless, and then, with a great dread in her heart, she burst forth:

"But it cannot be. You are wrong. You have missed the time. He is not in the tower, and I heard the horse galloping away."

But as the light fell on his features, and she saw the expression they bore, she stopped all trembling.

"Lady Capel," he said, "nothing has happened as yet. Come with me, if you like, and see."

"Then what does it all mean?"

"We shall know in five minutes—will you come?"

"Yes," she answered, as she stepped to his side, and the two passed together from the chapel.

They found the door of the tower leading into the garden open, and Dorothy called attention to this in a whisper, and she added, "You see, he has gone."

Maunsell made no answer, save with a warning gesture to observe silence, as he stepped out softly; the girl followed him, and then, keeping in the shadows and skirting the edge of the wall, they went forward slowly and cautiously.

Now and again Maunsell stayed his companion with a touch of his hand, and looked around him carefully; but except for themselves the place seemed still and deserted.

In this manner they went onwards until they were but a few yards away from the summer-house, and here Maunsell once more stopped, close to an arch cut in the high rose wall behind which they were. Before them the white night trembled over the summer-house, the green stretch of turt, and the wilderness of the rose garden; but where they stood the shadows, black, brown, and grey, stretched long and deep, else perhaps they would have seen they were not alone. For, scarce ten paces off, where the rose wall ended in a soft, sweeping curve,

as unconscious of their presence as they were of her, was the figure of a woman—a woman whose vengeance had come to her right hand at last, and who, crouching against the glistening leaves, stared out with a white face and hot, fierce eyes at something they did not see as yet.

Thus they stood a little space, and then they heard a footstep on the path.

Dorothy clutched Maunsell's arm. "Listen!" she whispered; "someone is coming."

Once more they heard it; then there was a swaying of white-blossomed boughs, and the next moment Kit Harden stepped out into the light, his drawn rapier in his hand.

Dorothy made a half-movement forward, but Maunsell restrained her.

"One moment," he whispered. "He is coming this way."

She drew back with reluctance, and then watched him as he came forward, carrying himself as bravely as ever, with an unconscious grace that was all his own.

He stopped at the edge of the turf and looked around him.

"So far so good," he muttered. "For once Noll's watch-dogs sleep. My friends are late. If the two women only knew——" And a heartless little laugh escaped him as he went on: "Faith! if I only knew where the horse is I'd levant without good-bye. As it is——" He shrugged his shoulders, and then, with another reckless laugh: "Egad! 'twould be rare to meet my Lord Protector here! I'd show him Touchet's new thrust in tierce," and he made a pass with his rapier, straight where a man's heart might be.

Now, low as he spoke, the still night carried his voice to where the watchers stood, and the words, the tone, and the manner made Dorothy shrink back trembling. It was as if she had been struck across the face. She was stunned, bewildered, and hot with the shame of it. She glanced up at Maunsell to see if he had heard—to see if he understood; but the shadow hid his features, and he stood still and motionless as a thing of stone.

In that moment all the doubts that Harden had allayed but so short a time back rose up full-armed within her. She tried to put them aside bravely. It could not be. Her ears had deceived her, she

had not heard those cruel words rightly. And then something happened.

There was a low, half-suppressed cry close to them, and the next instant a grey-cloaked figure, tall and slight, stood before Harden. He looked at her with a smile on his lips, and, sheathing his sword, held out his hand.

"So, Patty, come at last! I almost thought I was betrayed."

She took no notice of his outstretched hand, and from the midnight of her dark eyes a look flashed at him that should have warned him had he not been lost in his reckless mood.

"Betrayed," she said coldly, "and by whom?" And set as her voice was, her heart became like ice as she thought of the brink upon which he stood—this man whom she loved still, though she had lured him to his death.

"Yes, by my psalm-singing cousin. Faith! what a chance was his! A word to Noll, and poor Kit Harden—— But what ails thee, dear?"

For she had turned away from him as he spoke, and those who stood not two swords' length away saw her face as white as death. Harden stepped

up to her and took her hand ; but with a quick movement she wrenched herself from him, and still turning from him, her hands held to her forehead, she gasped : " My God ! My God ! "

But the fool in his reckless folly would not see. The moment, the chance, the opportunity of escape he thought so surely his were set aside with a sweep, and, putting his hand on her shoulder, he turned her to him.

" What ails thee, sweet ? Come, let me see thy face. Why, 'twould become a ghost," he laughed, as he gently put aside her hand and, bending forward, kissed her.

And those two who heard—those two who saw the veil being lifted from a man's life—what were their thoughts ? Maunsell bent down.

" Will you go back ? " he asked.

And the answer came in a whisper, fierce and low.

" No, stay. I must stay. This is the truth at last."

" Come," said Harden, " there is no fear. Is it the night and the stillness ? If so, remember they are all our own."

Once more Patience freed herself from him, and faced him with haggard eyes in which love and hate strove together.

"I—I am here to guide thee," she gasped; "the horse is there." And she pointed before her, where the gate was partly open. "See, the gate is open. My father is without. Go; the road is free."

She had seen the open gate, and guessed that death lay there—the sooner the better, else her heart would fail. He followed her outstretched arm, not heeding the deadly look, and saw too.

"I go," he said, "but not alone. Come, Patty."

"Man!" she exclaimed, "torture me not—go! Each moment is precious—go!" He looked at her as she stood before him, her hood thrown back, her pale face shining on him through the night. Once he had loved her. Even that evening in the forest when she had saved his life the feeling had come on him again, and he had owned her to be a queen amongst women. She loved him still. He knew and felt that. And who knows? Perhaps his love came back to him as he stood there on the edge of the grave. He stepped up to her, his eyes alight, his voice low and passionate. "I see it all," he said;

"'twas my own doing, sweet. I have sinned against you, but, as God is my witness, I have never ceased to love you," and he took her hand. "Listen! I was poor, hunted by debts, my lands gone, my steps dogged by misery. I was tempted, and I fell."

"Oh! lie no more," she gasped. "I know all—all, I say."

"No," he said, "not all. But this is the only thing I want you to know and believe—I have never ceased loving you. I love you still. Come with me—my queen—my wife. Beyond the seas there is happiness for us—come!"

"I cannot," she moaned, "I cannot." But even as she spoke she let him draw her towards him, and he kissed her—once—twice.

And then the guilty woman's heart broke, and the floodgates of her conscience opened. She tore herself from Harden with a quick and sudden effort, and stepped back—her voice shrill in its agony.

"No, no! I cannot come. Oh, you were right! You are betrayed! I did it! I! My God, what have I done?"

He did not realise at once, but as he saw the writhing figure before him it came to him.

"What does this mean?"

"All roads are watched," she gasped; "they but await the signal." And then, in a transport of contrition, she cast herself down at his feet, and moaned out: "I did it! I! I could not bear to see you another's. I was mad, and now—oh, Harden! Harden!" And her voice rose to a shriek as she clung to his knees, and grovelled before him. God pity her!

He flung her from him with a bitter and cruel word—flung her aside with a curse, and she rose and tottered to her feet, her mad eyes blazing, her lips wet with blood. His hand was raised as if to strike, but at that moment an imperious voice called out, "Hold!" and Cromwell stepped from the summer-house.

Harden swung round at the word, and the two faced each other.

"Cromwell!" he said through his clenched teeth. "You!"

"Yes, I! Nay: Never lay your hand upon your sword—a word and my guards are on you! Come, surrender!"

Harden glanced quickly around him, as if seek-

ing some means of escape. Then he shrugged his shoulders with a little laugh, and made a movement as if to unbuckle his sword—and hesitated.

"Will it be the scaffold?" he asked. His tone was as cool and collected as if he were making a trivial inquiry.

As he spoke a sob burst from Patience, and Cromwell's eyes rested on her for a moment.

"That might have been spared you but for this." And he made a slight movement of his hand towards the wretched woman, who stood there in her sorrow and her shame, as though rooted to the spot.

"Ah! Delilah weighs in the balance, does she?" And then with the calmest assurance he turned on Cromwell, unbuckling his sword as he spoke, and holding it in his hand:

"Come, sir! I will buy my life——"

"The price?"

"My life is forfeit. I am poor—I am needy; but I know the secrets of the Court—I'll call it the Court, if you please. These secrets are worth something to you. Willis is dead. I know that, and know that you have no friend there now, and the King trusts me utterly. Come, let it be a bargain!"

And with brazen effrontery he made a step forward towards Cromwell, who stood with folded arms, his sombre glance fixed upon the speaker, and even as he spoke the words of shame Dorothy and Maunsell stepped out from their shelter, and stood in the open, close to the speakers.

Harden's back was towards them. He did not see; but Cromwell saw, though he made no sign, but stood there in a grim silence.

"Come," said Harden again, "'tis a fair offer. Dead, I am worth nothing—alive, I would be more precious than rubies to you," he mocked.

"You would spy for me, then?"

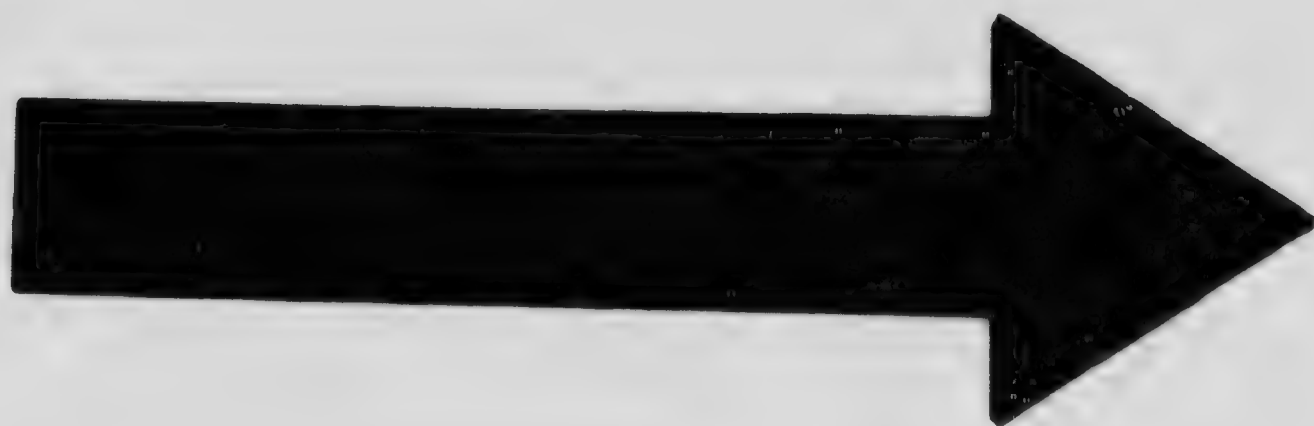
The biting contempt of the tone was not lost; but the answer came cool and insolent:

"The Huntingdon grazier still!" And then, with a pause and a cynical indifference in his voice, "Yes! spy, if you call it so."

"'Twas for this I wanted you; but now I decline."

Harsh and stern was Cromwell's voice, and Harden stepped back the pace he had taken forward, but not from fear. There was a steely glitter in his eyes and an ominous ring in his voice.

"Be careful! There is danger in the air."



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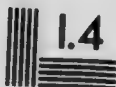
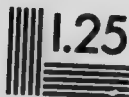
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"But not for me," thundered Cromwell, hot anger shaking his frame. "You are too base even for a spy. You! Perjurer and liar! Dishonoured gentleman! See! There they stand. The witnesses of your shame."

He pointed to Dorothy and Maunsell as he spoke, and Harden turned and saw, and, seeing, felt that they knew all! Ay, his shame was open to them as broad daylight, and he knew he was lost. The woman whose soul he had killed, the woman whose heart he had broken, and the man he had tried to slay with a felon blow were all there—all witnesses to the deeps of his ignominy.

The past, black as it was, might have been forgiven him, this he felt, but for that one last foul thing—when he stooped to buy his life at the price of his honour. He did not dare to meet their look, but shrank back snarling, his face distorted, his eyes blazing with quenchless hate and despair, his breath coming thick and fast.

And now Cromwell's voice, dry and imperious, cut in upon the intolerable silence.

"Come, sir, end this. Your sword!"

Quick as lightning it gleamed in Harden's hand,

and with an oath he thrust at Cromwell, and the fate of England had been changed but for another sword that flashed forth as swiftly as Harden's, and struck his deadly thrust aside. It was Maunsell, and on the instant Harden had turned on him.

"Dog!" he said, "take this!" And Maunsell reeled back, his sword arm hanging limply to his side. Swift as a panther Harden had sprung to repeat his stroke, when Dorothy sprang forward and came between the two; and at that moment Cromwell's whistle rang out sharp and shrill, and there was a rush of hurrying feet.

Harden's arm dropped at Dorothy's look. "You have robbed me!" he hissed, and leaped back, for Ireton was there with his guards, and they had all but ringed him in. His reckless courage never failed him for an instant. He was going to die, he knew; but he would die sword in hand. "A Harden! A Harden!" he called out, and flew at the nearest of the guards.

Grim soldier as the man was, he gave way before that deadly blade, and Harden, seeing the way open, dashed for the gate.

But his hour had come. At the clash of the

swords and the sound of the whistle Peter Mauley had stepped into the garden, and now stood, his carbine ready, waiting his chance.

"By my hand shall he fall," he muttered; "he who hath slain my comrade," and he raised his weapon. Harden had not taken three steps forward when there was a flash and a sharp report, and, tossing his arms in the air, he staggered backward and fell—a dead man.

"Lo, he hath fallen! He hath fallen!" and Peter Mauley's harsh voice rang out, as he ran forwards, his smoking carbine in his hand.

They crowded round the dead man, who lay face upwards. His hat had fallen aside, and the moonlight fell on his fair hair and haughty features, distorted and drawn in his death agony. So swift, so awful in its suddenness, was the end that all were speechless and silent, and even the fierce Mauley, after one look at the still figure, stepped back amidst the crowd that came pouring in through the gate.

Suddenly there was a cry, a shrill shriek of agony, that thrilled those who heard it to the heart, and a woman ran forwards, and, kneeling down, gently lifted the dead man's head, and kissed the cold brow.

Great sobs shook her frame, and then she lifted her dry, burning eyes, eyes that blazed with madness, and looked around her.

"He was my lover—my husband—my all—and I gave him to the death; and who will give him back to me, ye who have slain him body and soul—body and soul?" she moaned, and went on: "Dear eyes that will never look in mine again; dear hands that are so cold—so cold; dear heart that is still—it is I, Patience, who calls to thee!" And again and again she passionately kissed those chill lips.

"He does not answer! He cannot hear!" she went on wildly, and then she laughed—and such a laugh—the agony of it wrung her hearers' hearts; but ere its terrible, mirthless echoes ceased her mood had changed, and she ran her fingers through his long fair locks.

"Gold!" she said, "fine gold, and no silk as soft as this. Ah, Kit! The old days will come back for you and for me, dear—for you and for me!" And, sitting on the turf, she placed the head in her lap and began to croon over it, rocking herself to and fro the while.

In the awful horror of the scene no one ventured to speak, no one stirred.

Suddenly her face flushed scarlet, and, putting the head from her, she rose to her knees.

"I did it!" she shrieked, "I slew him—my love—my dear! O, God! forgive——" She tried to totter to her feet, but her strength failed her, and, with a sharp, half-strangled cry, she fell forward with her face on Harden's breast, and lay there still and motionless, a thin stream of blood issuing from her lips. Death had claimed her in mercy, and she was gone.

Then, as they lay together, Cromwell stepped up, and, hat in hand, stood for a space over them in silence—his head bowed; and when he raised it there were tears, incredible tears, on his iron cheeks, and then the stillness was broken by the sobs of a woman weeping. Dorothy had given way, and, clinging to Maunsell, who despite his wound still held his place, burst into a storm of weeping. It was well that it had happened. It broke the spell.

"Maunsell," said Cromwell, and his voice shook, "take her away. I will see to this."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HER FORGIVENESS.

WITH the morning the trumpets blared " Boot and saddle," and an hour later, whilst the dew was yet wet upon the grass and glittered on the leaves, the long line of the Ironsides trotted through Coombe Woods for the last time.

A little in the rear Cromwell and Maunsell rode side by side, the latter with his wounded arm in a sling.

They spoke long and earnestly to each other, and half unconsciously slackened pace ; until at last they had fallen so far back that but for an occasional glint of steel in the skirts of the forest they had lost sight of the troop.

Finally, Cromwell reined in and held out his gauntleted hand.

" And so we part at last, Maunsell," he said ; " thou to take thy road, and I mine. I understand all now, and I wish thee well."

Maunsell took the outstretched hand. " Your

Highness," he said, "England can no longer be home for me. Within a week I shall be on the seas, and in the new world which lies beyond hope to forget the old—all except the days we fought and bled for the cause."

The Lord Protector looked hard at him, a grave sympathy in his glance.

"So be it!" he said. "Last night we saw God's way—and this, mayhap, is best for thee."

And without another word of greeting he put spurs to his horse and galloped off.

For a little Antony Maunsell stood where he was, watching the square-set figure as the good horse bore it away. Now and again, as Cromwell passed from the shadows of the great trees into the wet light of the morning, it fell in rippling rays of fire upon his corselet; and thus it was Maunsell saw him for the last time, in a glory of flame as he spurred round the elbow of the wood, and was lost to view.

Slowly and sadly Antony Maunsell turned rein to ride back, and as he did so it came to him that he was on the very spot where, three days ago, his hand of vengeance had been stayed.

The shadow of the great elm was over him, the fallen tree was scarce a lance length away, and the turf was still cut up with the marks of trampling feet. There, where the bridge spanned the stream, all was light and colour, with the pink of the ragged robin and yellow stars of the goldilocks. Here it was that his hand had been stayed—stayed because it was not his to strike.

"It is true," he muttered, "we saw God's way last night"; and then, touching the black with his spur, rode back in the direction of Coombe Royal.

They buried Kit Harden in his own church at Hardenholt, where his forefathers slept, and where he—last of his race—was to rest until the dreadful trumpet rang that would summon the quick and the dead to answer before their Judge. And she—his poor victim—found another grave where kindly hands laid her; and, when it was over, Elhu Burnside rent his garment like a prophet of old, and, taking his staff, went forth—where, no man knew. And they who saw him go, and marked his silver hairs and the endless sorrow on his stricken face, let him pass unquestioned and untouched, and none dared hinder him.

All this and more was Maunsell's task, and when it was all done he stood before a pale, sad-eyed woman—a woman to-day who was but a girl yesterday—and bade her farewell.

During the days of her trial she had found in this man, whom she thought at first her deadly foe, her best friend. In her despair she had turned to him, and it was his arm that had helped and aided to the end. She had begun to think of him as a staff of support, and was dimly conscious of a great sacrifice made for her. And now he was going, and for ever—this she knew.

She fully realised why, and felt it to be for the best. There could be no hope for him—never—and so she let him go.

She did not die, or fall ill, or give way to hopeless despair, though the laughter, the girlhood, and the happiness that was hers passed from her life, and with it the love she had felt for Harden.

Pride came to her aid, and as time wore on the heart wounds healed, though their scars still remained.

There was much to do in that little kingdom of hers, and here, where her name was revered

throughout the broad country, she threw herself into her work—a true feudal chatelaine.

At times, however, her heart went back to the past, and amidst the shadows she conjured up then there was one figure that ever stood out, brave and strong. And then, half unconsciously at first, she began to miss him, to long to see him once again, even to reproach herself for not having stayed him. She thought she could have done that, even though there could never be anything between them.

No news of Maunsell ever came. From the time he had ridden forth from Coombe Royal all had been silence, dense and impenetrable.

Late one evening, as she dreamed over the fire, her thoughts went back to the past, and then, as ever before, began to centre and concentrate upon the man she had banished. She began, however, to think of him more softly, more kindly, than she had ever done before. Where was he? In what distant land? Living or dead? She knew not. In her heart she began to blame him for his silence. He might have written a line, sent a message.

Suddenly she sprang up in hot anger. "He could not have cared," she said; "he has forgot-

ten——" Her eyes filled with tears, her face flushed, and then it came to her that for her there could yet be love, and life, and happiness—and with her own hands she had thrown it aside!

One day a whisper ran throughout the land that thrilled it from end to end; and then a post who rode red-spurred from London made the tidings sure. The Lord Protector was dead; the strong hand that held his country in a grip of iron was chill and cold, and there was none to wear the giant's robe.

Long dead hopes revived. Men began to whisper amongst themselves of the coming of the King. And at last, one mornin' amidst the peal of merry bells, the Lord's Anointed came to his own, and the glad heart of a nation went forth to welcome him; but amidst the throngs that filled the streets of the great city, amidst the crowd that jostled and swayed before Westminster Hall, there were certain dark-browed, fierce-looking men—men who could never forget, men whose lips hissed curses as their eyes fell upon a grinning skull, placed high above two others, on the spikes of the gate beneath which the King was to pass.

But a short time back and those empty sockets held eyes whose very look was enough to make those who now jeered and scoffed below shrink and shiver. There was a time when a word from the dead man's lips would have made nations beyond the seas tremble, and it had come to this! A headless corpse that swung drearily on its chains at Tyburn—a ghastly skull that frowned in silence over a roaring, hissing crowd! Living he was beyond their reach; dead this was their ignoble vengeance.

All this and more—news of the great doings of the Court, news of the pardon of all men who had borne arms against him by a generous King, news of how gay and bright the great city was, came to Dorothy Capel in her woodland home; but no temptation could induce her to leave Coombe Royal, and there she remained a gentle queen of her countryside.

One evening, when Coombe Woods were red and gold in their autumn glory, Dorothy Capel found herself in the very heart of the forest. It was almost sunset; the shadows were growing long and deep, and ever and again as the wind swept through

the solemn trees there was a musical rustling of the leaves, and the boughs overhead shook and moaned like the cordage of a ship in a gale.

In chequered light and shade a long glade stretched before her far into the deeps of the forest, and as she stood at the head of this and let her eyes run westward, where against the low, sunlit hills Coombe Royal stood out huge and vast, she heard the distant beat of galloping hoofs. Nearer and nearer they came, and she faced round and looked. Far down the glade a horseman was riding directly towards her. Far off though he was, there was something strangely familiar about the figure. It was—no, it was impossible—it could not be! And she had stepped back behind the shelter of a gnarled oak, her heart wildly beating with a new hope.

As he approached the horseman slackened pace to a trot, and then to a walk. Finally, as he reached the head of the glade, he reined up his horse, a powerful black, whose foam-flecked sides bore witness how fast and far he had been ridden. And then, all unconscious of the watcher so near at hand, he sprang from the saddle, and, looping the

reins in his arm, stood as Dorothy had stood but a moment before, and let his eyes linger over the purpling hills and soft landscape, and his face was turned towards Coombe Royal.

It was he, Black Tony, come back—a little thinner than of yore, as tall and grim-looking as ever; but there was a wondrous softness in his eyes as he stood there watching the fading lights. And then there came the sound of a voice—a voice that he thought he would never hear again, and someone was standing before him with outstretched hand, and welcoming him back.

He held her hand in his, and gazed at her. She was the same, and yet not the same. Taller, more stately, graver, but more beautiful than in the days gone by.

When the first greetings were over, something like a constraint fell over them. There were walls and walls of silence, the silence of past years, to be overthrown. He mistook the reserve in which she hedged herself for coldness, and she thought him stiffer, more formal, if possible, than in former times.

For a while they talked of the most ordinary

things, and she told him all her news—how Polly Maple was Polly Maple no longer, but, as Mistress Hopkins, now ruled in the place of Mistress Battersby at Coombe Royal—this had happened about a year ago, when one fine day Marjorie Battersby had changed her name to Rock, and now lived under the shadow of Coombe Royal, in a cottage that the Cornet had purchased.

"And do you know," she said, with a laugh—something of her old brightness was coming back to her—"the Cornet is writing the history of the Thirty Years' War."

And so on—with their hearts a hundred miles away, until at last Maunsell said:

"The King has pardoned me with others, and one day it came to me to look once more on England, and so I returned."

"And you stay, do you not?" Try as she would, she could not hide the eagerness in her voice.

"No," he answered; "of what avail would it be? There is a great world beyond the seas where a man may work, and forget if he can."

"Is there need to forget?" He started at the words. She had stepped back a pace from him

as she spoke, and the shadows were over her face, else he had seen her eyes full of tears.

"Of what avail is it to remember? And yet I cannot forget, and therefore I go."

She could not let him pass from her life again. If he but knew—if he but knew! The blood rushed in flames to her cheeks. For a moment she stood irresolute, and then:

"But if you were asked—if I asked you to stay?" she said softly.

"You?" he said, and stepped forward; and then their eyes met for one brief instant, and Antony Maunsell knew that he had won—won when all seemed lost and hopeless.

"At last!" he said. "At last!" And, bending forwards, strong and masterful, took her in his arms.

* * * * *

They stood together watching the sunset gild the crests of the distant hills, and Dorothy turned to Maunsell.

"The King has forgiven you, but you have yet to ask another pardon—and from me."

"For what?—wherein lies my offence?" And he smiled down at her.

"For long years of silence—for years that are past and can never come back to us. Can you be forgiven that?"

And Antony Maunsell took his pardon from her lips.

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